

Running the Race of Faith – Cross and Glory (Heb 12:1-3)



A. Two Principles of Faith

Hebrew 11 lists many heroes of faith since the dawn of history. Their lives are marked by one common theme that enabled them to obtain good testimony from God. All of them kept their faith strong to the end, and this pleased God. The lives of these men and women show us that, while the principle of faith is the same for all, the expression and outworking of faith were different for each one. They show two traits that marked their faith:

1. They demonstrated their faith in God by unwavering trust in the promises of His eternal word over adverse life situations. In the adversities of life, they believed God was with them and overcame impossible challenges they faced. And in so doing, their faith was tested and refined, and they and God became an invincible team.
2. They put much greater value on the eternal reward from God over the temporal recompense of men. Many paid a costly price for their choices of faith - some with their lives, and they ultimately received a testimony from God that they pleased Him. Every true believer's faith will be tested on these two points.

B. How is My Faith in Jesus Christ Expressed?

Should I choose from the Hebrews 11 catalogue of faith the hero I like the most, e.g., Moses, David, the prophets, etc? And hope to express my faith in the same way - the hero is the best fits my life though they all lived vastly diverse lives at different times of history? Yes, these men and women are excellent references in the library of faith. But there is one supreme example we are all to focus on – the Lord Jesus Christ - '*looking unto Jesus (present tense)*' or '*fixing our eyes on Jesus (NIV)*.' Why?

1. Jesus Christ, God's Son is the only One who perfectly pleased the Father - in all things and at all times. He has finished everything His Father has given Him to do by the time He was thirty-three. And He returned to the Father to sit down on the throne with Him. His is the ultimate victory of faith par excellence. There is none like Him. No one even comes close!

Jesus is the perfect example of the life of faith. So, fix your eyes on Jesus and emulate your life after Him. As a man, Jesus too lived His life on earth by faith. Apostle Paul decided to live his life by the same faith Jesus had, '*I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in (lit. 'of') the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.*' (Gal 2:20)

2. Jesus is the One who started you on your journey of faith, not you. And He is the one who will see you through to the finish line. Jesus will never leave you nor forsake you. '*The LORD is my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?*' (Heb 13:5-6) '*...and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us...*' (Heb 12:1). Who set the race before you? Jesus! He is the author and finisher of your faith, and He has laid down your racetrack before time began. So, we can run our race with endurance. Running the race of faith requires endurance.

C. The Right Attitude of Runners

Runners need (i) endurance, and (ii) self-control. We are to think of our life as a race – the most important race. We run it only ONCE in time and eternity (1 Cor 9:24-27). Many run in the Olympics but there is only one winner at the end. We are all to run in such a way to win the crown. The athletes exercise enormous self-control and endurance for a crown that will perish with time. We are running for a crown that will outlast this life into eternity. The difference between the earthly and heavenly race is, we do not compete with others but with ourselves - against sin and distractions of life. '*Let us lay aside every weight and the sin which so easily ensnares us.*' (12:1)

1. Aim at the life of HOLINESS. '*Let us set aside sin, which so easily ensnares us,*' or '*besetting sin (KJV).*' Sin entangles us (NIV). It acts like a net to trap us, like addictions. We can develop a taste for a particular sin, which can trap our souls like drug and alcohol abuse. 'Besetting sin' repeatedly drags us down to mud, and it drives a wedge in our relationship with the Lord. If we are to run a winning race before the Lord with endurance, we must first set aside the besetting sins (2 Cor 6:16-7:1). So, when you are determined to run your race of faith, it means you must grow in holiness. In the sight of God, only a holy life is a successful life, and living a holy life takes rigorous self-control as running in any race would.
2. Aim at the life of FOCUS. Not only do we need to get rid of the besetting sins that entangle and trap us up, but we are to get rid of unnecessary weights that slow us down. We are living in a cyber world, and so much time and brain space are consumed by the media, especially bad news.

*Phil 4:6-9 - 'Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by **PRAYER** and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy - **MEDITATE** on these things. The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these **DO**, and the God of peace will be with you.'*

Apostle Paul here starts with the peace of God and finishes with the God of peace. How do we maintain this peace of God in our hearts and lives?

- (i) Prayer of commitment - the key to the life of faith is offering your life on the altar of God. (Phil 4:6)
- (ii) The discipline of thought life – right meditation is the key. (Phil 4:8)
- (iii) Faith that is actively put into practice. (Phil 4:9)

D. How Do I Fix My Eyes on Jesus the Author and the Finisher of My Faith?

Jesus had His eyes fixed on TWO important fixed points for His race of faith: (i) the cross, and (ii) the glory to follow. If we lose sight of either of these, we can go off the racetrack and disqualify ourselves from the race. Many Christians have lost this vision and the result is 'shipwrecked faith'.

1. The cross was the only pathway to glory. Anyone who offers you a pathway that bypasses the cross is a deceiver. Some declare we do not need to dwell on the cross because it represents defeat, we are only to focus on the victory of resurrection. Some imply if you have 'strong faith', you do not need to carry your own cross to follow Jesus. This is the number one danger of modern Christian teaching – cross-less Christianity. The result is a completely carnal and earthbound vision for life. The end goal of such 'faith' is to live a pampered life, pandering the earthly appetites – the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life (1 John 2:16).

Jesus said, 'If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me.' (Luke 9:23) Jesus despised the shame of His cross, endured, and sat down on the throne at the right hand of God. When we lose the vision of the cross, our faith can degenerate into religious witchcraft – a religious attempt to manipulate God to get what we want – what witches do. 'O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you that you should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed among you as crucified?' (Gal 3:1). If we want to run and finish our race successfully, we must stay close to the cross of Jesus.

'For Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world.' (2 Tim 4:10) C.f. '...concerning the faith have suffered shipwreck...' (1 Tim 1:18-20) What is the cross in your life? When Christians pin all their faith, hope and love on this life and see no further than the rewards in this world, they are on the way to shipwrecking their faith. This is not the faith of Jesus Christ, leading us to glory. Many credible Christian testimonies of visits to heaven and hell include the shock of seeing Christian leaders in hell. This is consistent with Jesus' teaching, who said, 'Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.' (Matt 7:22-23)

2. Never lose sight of the glory to follow in eternity. This is our eternal reward. Can you imagine what goes on around the throne of God right now? Before the throne is the crystal-like sea of glass - of undisturbed tranquillity and peace (Rev 4:6). There is not even a rogue ripple in heaven. The only sound that is roaring in heaven is the unending worship of God declaring day and night, 'Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come.' (Rev 4:8) Their eyes are fixed on God, and unending praise and worship flow out of them on God's holiness, God's sovereignty, and God's eternity.

They also praise the cross of Jesus forever in heaven! 'Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom, and strength, and honour and glory and blessing!' (Rev 5:12) Will it be any different for those who follow Jesus? The cross is different for each one, but the pathway is the same. First the cross then the glory. Jesus says to the church, 'Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come into him and dine with him, and he with Me. To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne.' (Rev 3:21)

Let us go through the narrow gate and narrow road that leads to life and glory. Looking unto Jesus let us run our race with endurance and sit down with Him in the heavenly place. Amen.