



VILLAGE BIBLE CHURCH SUGAR GROVE CAMPUS

Real Faith

Hebrews 12:1–2

Tim Badal | Easter Sunday, April 4, 2021

Turn in your Bibles to the book of Hebrews as we continue our series, "Jesus: Greatest of All Time." As we've been going chapter by chapter, verse by verse through this book, it's quite amazing that we come to what I believe to be the exclamation point of the entire book.

Although Jesus Christ was dead and buried, we'll see how He now resides at the right hand of the throne of God. Even though it doesn't say anything about His resurrection, we clearly see that Jesus is now alive and well, and is now being worshiped in heaven even today. So we are joining a chorus of angels in worshipping Him as the Champion of champions.

Today we'll read about the crowning of a Champion in a coronation service that is happening because of the resurrection of Christ from the dead. Also we'll see that we've been given a challenge to run like Jesus did in the race that is marked out for us. So let's look at Hebrews 12:1-2:

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us,² looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

There is something awesome in the crowning of a champion. I love athletics and love watching championship matches. We're soon going to be crowning a new NCAA champion after all the March Madness is over. It has been an incredible season. If you didn't watch the second game last night, go find it. It's a game to remember. So tomorrow someone will hold the trophy up high as they're introduced as the number one college championship basketball team in our nation.

As a kid growing up, the highlights of my life were these championships, going clear back to 1985 when Mike Ditka led the Chicago Bears to be champions over the Patriots. Then I think of the '90s when I watched Michael Jordan win, not one or two, but six championships with the Bulls. Then as I've gotten older in these recent years, we've seen the Blackhawks win, not one or two, but three Stanley Cup championships. The Chicago Fire soccer team has also won four championships. Even the White Sox won the World Series in 1906, 1917 and then again in 2005. But all of these pale in comparison to 2016 when my Cubs finally won the World Series. What a great time of celebration! What a glorious thing to celebrate championships.

However, we in the church celebrate a championship like no other. It's the championship of Jesus Christ. You might be wondering how I find that in this text, but there is a biblical way to get there. The passage says that Jesus is the Founder and Perfecter of our faith. The New Living translation says He's the Champion of champions. Why? Because He ran the race with perfection and now is exalted as the One Who has finished the race and has been declared the Victor.

Easter serves as a celebration of the resurrection of Christ.

As we celebrate Easter, we celebrate the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Even though the resurrection isn't mentioned in our passage today, we can infer it for two reasons.



On this day we celebrate His endurance.

First, we see that Jesus has endurance. It says He endured the cross. This takes us back to Good Friday, with Jesus hanging on the cross. He scorned the shame of being put on trial for things He didn't do and then died a criminal's death. If you look ahead to verse three of Hebrews 12, you'll see that the shame of the cross wasn't the only thing He endured. It says He endured "*such hostility against himself...*" The writer notes that most of us would have grown weary and lost heart.

Let's not forget that the celebration of Easter entails all of Jesus' life: the trials, the temptation, the times of triumph. Why did Jesus endure all these things? We needed Him to live in our world as a person like we are, so He could die in our place, but He had to run this race with a perfection we cannot have. And that's what He did.

On this day we celebrate His exaltation.

How do we know this? Verse two describes His exaltation. After He had endured the cross and scorned the shame, He went into the grave. You may be thinking, "Now if that's true, then how can the writer say He's also seated at the right hand of the throne of God?" It's because that grave is empty. He's no longer dead. He's alive, He has ascended to heaven and lives right now in the company of angels and the great cloud of witnesses mentioned in verse one. He resides in ongoing praise and worship as being the Champion of champions.

So on Easter, we remember the endurance of our Lord and Savior and how He ran the race well. Not only do we rejoice because He finished the race, but also the Father has seated Him in the place of the greatest preeminence in heaven, at His own right hand. Since the day He rose from the dead, Jesus has been exalted as the King of kings and the Lord of lords. Right now a heavenly audience is worshiping Him, saying, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain."

One of the first things any victorious team does is that traditional Gatorade bucket being poured over the head of the coach. I wonder if, on that first Easter Sunday, the angels didn't grab a celestial Gatorade container and throw it all over heaven, announcing and rejoicing in the reality that the devil had been defeated, sin had been conquered and the grave had been destroyed. That first Easter Sunday was an exaltation, a time of coronation. God the Father rolled out the red carpet and held a parade for the Champion of champions, Jesus Christ.

If we were to stop there, however, we would remain spectators. The author of Hebrews is certainly telling us to worship Jesus for all He is and all He has done.

Easter serves as a challenge for us to finish our race.

Jesus has run and finished His race, and He did so perfectly. But now we have a race we too need to run. The author tells us that we have a race that is marked out for us. What is that race? It's living a life trusting in and relying wholly on Jesus as the Founder and Perfector of our faith.

We have two great examples of how to do this. We have the imperfect examples out of Hebrews 11. If you look back, you'll see the many times it says, "By faith so-and-so...by faith so-and-so...by faith so-and-so..." Then in Hebrews 12 we have the perfect example of Jesus. So we have people who have run the race before us and we can model our running after them. Here are some of the lessons we learn along the way, from imperfect people as well as from Jesus, the perfect runner of the race.

Finishing our race requires letting go of our baggage.

So if we want to run well and finish well, we need to let go of our baggage. Notice how the author of Hebrews tells us we must "*lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely.*" These are two different things we need to consider.

First, the weights are the bags or the extra pounds a runner might have that could slow him down. To run a race well, you want to be as light as you can be, with your own body or from the standpoint of clothing or accessories. The ancient runners in the Olympics were nearly naked when they ran. They didn't want any encumbrances that might hold them back.

Amanda and I got married right after Christmas, then spent a few days here before going on our honeymoon. Amanda had recently been given a 40-piece suitcase set. There was a bag for everything. She wanted to make sure she was a good steward of the set, so she packed something in each of the bags. That's fine. It's not far from the curb to the ticket counter at the airport. But there was a problem. The day we left, about ten inches of snow came down, so we were late getting to the airport. Because the plane

was already boarding, we were told we would need to check our bags at the plane. That meant I had bags around my neck, running at full speed—which isn't very fast. My wife only had her purse, so she ran ahead of me saying, "Hurry up! We're going to miss our plane."

Let me tell you that with all that baggage, I couldn't run very well. That's the same in life. We carry things in our lives that keep us from running the race well. However, many of the weights the author is describing are good things. Things like our family, our job, all the things we normally pursue in life. God gives us many things to enjoy. But the Bible says we must be careful about seeking things in this world.

Jesus says in the Sermon on the Mount, "Seek first the Kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 6:33). Of course, all of us are good at creating lists of weights other people need to throw off, but maybe we need to ask God, "How am I running? Are there things getting in the way of me running my race well?"

In addition to these weights, the text also mentions there are sins that can cling to us that we also need to throw off. Another translation says these sins "easily entangle" us. These are things that trip us up or even cause us to be disqualified. The weights only distract us, but the sins can disqualify us from enjoying the race.

A runner who steps out of his lane is going to be called "disqualified." That's what happens when we go after sins like pride, lust, self-centeredness instead of focusing on others, evil thoughts or words. We all have these things, although some sins cling closer to us than others, so they need to be thrown off. We need to rid ourselves of them.

Why? The devil has thrown those things into our path as temptations to trip us up. The Bible tells us he seeks to steal, kill and destroy (John 10:10). How many runners have been tripped up by their sins? We need to ask God to show us what sins "easily entangle" us. What are we unwilling to give up?

Finishing our race requires leaving it all on the field.

As we throw off the clothing or baggage that hinders us and by God's grace rid ourselves of our sins—using the Word as our defense against the devil's temptations—we then need to leave all these things on the race track. We need to run with endurance.

These verses tell us that Jesus as the true Champion was able to endure the cross with joy. His journey required great grit and tenacity. This race isn't always fun. Some of you may have run a kilometer race where they throw paint at you. They call it a "fun run." But this isn't that. This isn't a casual walk. At times, the race can be agonizing.

Jesus left it all on the field. He gave every ounce of what He had. He even asked the Father to let the cup pass from Him, but the Father didn't take it from Him (Matthew 26:39). Instead, He ran the race to the finish.

Perhaps you've seen runners in longer races who exerted all their energy. When they crossed the finish line, they completely collapsed. Jesus gave everything He had. He was like a drink offering being poured out on the cross. At the very end, when He said, "It is finished," He then said, "Father, into Your hands I commit My Spirit" (John 19:30; Luke 23:46). It was as though He reached the finish line and then fell down, exhausted from paying for all our sins. He was the ransom God required so our sins could be forgiven and we could be cleansed. Likewise, we need to give our all to the race.

But here's the problem. We tend to run casually. We give ourselves to other concerns, to activities, dreams and even sinful distractions. We expend all our energy on taking care of ourselves, forgetting that this race is not something we've chosen. Rather, it has been "set before us" by God. God has marked out a unique course for each of us. He chooses our track. Often we tend to look at other runners and think we'd prefer to run on their track. They don't have the hurdles and obstacles we keep encountering. We think they have it easier, so we'd like to be like them. "My race is hard. I'm having to sweat more and I'm getting hurt along the way."

It's true that not all our races are the same. In these past two weeks we've had two funerals. One was for Loren Burroughs, a man in his 50s who died from complications of Covid. Yesterday we had a funeral for a 29-year-old mother of two. Think of the race those family members are running now, with sorrow and anguish for their loss. We tend to compare our race with those that look easier, complaining that we have it much harder, but we need to realize there are others who have harder races marked out for them by God. We must never belly-ache about where we are, but rather simply run well the race God has chosen for us, giving it all we've got.

Finishing our race requires looking to Jesus every step of the way.

The author gives us one final instruction regarding how to run our race well: we must look to Jesus every step of the way. There's one truth that is true of every person who is here today. We're all running a race. The question to ask on this Easter Sunday is are you running for yourself or are you running for someone else? The Bible says everyone enters the race, but only some will receive the prize.

The author of Hebrews tells us we must fix our eyes on Jesus. We need to focus on Him. That means we'll never run our race well if we're running apart from Jesus. So on this Easter Sunday, you have a decision to make. Will you run this race on our own? Yes, you might get accolades and praise, but I've learned in my 44 years on this earth is that troubles come your way and that without Christ in your life you'll never be able to endure.

When the Bible says to look to Jesus, it means taking our eyes off ourselves. Stop thinking we can do this on our own. Jesus came, died and was raised from the dead so you and I might have life, so we might be able to run the race that has been marked out for us—and to finish it. Maybe this morning you're running by yourself. I implore you today: start running with Jesus. Ask Him to lead and guide you. He offers forgiveness of those sins that so easily entangle you and the strength to lay aside the weights, so you can run your race like Jesus did.

Without Him we can't finish our race well. Without Him we'll get injured along the way. We need the Champion of champions Who, for the joy set before Him, endured the cross and made a way for you and me to run our race and finish in victory. Listen, this is what Easter is all about. Jesus finished His race so you and I can finish our race as well. We aren't going to be given the seat of preeminence that He was given. He alone sits at the right hand of God the Father. But as you and I cross the finish line, whether it's today or 70 years from now, we can hear our Heavenly Father say, "Well done, good and faithful servant" (Luke 19:17). So run with Jesus, celebrating what He has done and allowing His challenge to fall on you. Let go of the baggage, leave it all on the field, then in each and every moment, look to Him. He will see you through.

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All Scriptures quoted directly from the English Standard Version unless otherwise noted.

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