

The Heavenly Race

by John Hames

The sermon emphasizes the importance of laying aside every weight and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and running the heavenly race with patience, looking unto Jesus as our file-leader and author of our faith.

Scripture: Psalm 119:105, Proverbs 3:5, 1 Corinthians 9:24, Philippians 3:13, Colossians 3:2, 2 Timothy 4:7, Hebrews 12:1, Hebrews 12:15, James 1:2, 1 Peter 5:7

Topics: "Christian Living", "Perseverance Of Faith"

Description

John Hames preaches on the spiritual race of the Christian life, drawing parallels to an Olympic race where believers are called to run with patience, laying aside every weight and the inbred sin that hinders them. The sermon emphasizes the importance of looking unto Jesus as the author and finisher of our faith, who endured the cross and is seated at the right hand of God. Hames highlights the need to rid ourselves of inward hindrances like inbred sin and weights such as discouragement, criticism, and fear, urging believers to run the race with patience and divine guidance.

Transcript

"Wherefore seeing we are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us ... 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 is set down at the right hand of the throne of God." Hebrews 12:1, 2.

The above text is filled with some of the greatest truths to be found in the New Testament. It gives scope to the play of the imagination; moreover, it fires the heart and stirs the emotional nature. Here the Apostle Paul is using a familiar figure to make a spiritual application. The Olympic games and races were well-known events to the general public. The word of God compares the Christian life to a course -- a race to be run. You can readily see that a race suggests intense earnestness. In walking, one may look around; in running a race, every muscle and nerve of the body is brought into full play. The Christian life is not a mere picnic but is filled with great zeal and earnestness.

In this heavenly race that is set before us, there is a beginning and an end. Where is the starting point? Since this race is for believers only the beginning must be outside the zone of sin. It is where you and I receive divine life and are made partakers of the divine nature. Where is the goal? The goal is at the end of the race. It is reached when we finish our course, lay aside our armor, and take our place among the

blood-washed throng on the other shore.

Great preparations were made for Olympic races. The runner often practiced carrying weights for days before the race came off, in order that in the race he might be light-footed, but he never ran the race with these weights. In Paul's application of the illustration, some great facts are stated. First, there is given to us an injunction telling us what to do: "... let us run with patience the race that is set before us." There is also given an incentive ... seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us ..." Another incentive is given us: "Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith." Run the race; rid yourself of the inward hindrance.

In this passage there are two things which we are called upon to lay aside:

I. We are to lay aside the sin which doth so easily beset us. That besetting sin is inbred sin. You will hear people say that their besetting sin is a hot flashy temper; another will say his is pride; still another thinks that his besetting sin is a weakness toward certain temptations. The besetting sin is inbred sin -- the nest egg of all these other sins. In the twelfth chapter of Hebrews, verse fifteen, the same writer calls this sin a root of bitterness. A tree sprouts, grows, is kept alive

from the main tap root. Just so inbred sin is the tap root of all such sins as anger, malice, pride, jealousy, envy, and strife. Inbred sin is that sin which causes one to be unkind and say harsh things to a child or a maid in the home. It is responsible for all the divisions in the church and home life.

St. Paul also speaks of this besetting sin as the "body of sin." This does not refer to the human body. If so, the Greek word "soma" would have been used. Instead we have the term "sarx" which indicates the fleshly principle or carnal mind. On the Gulf of Mexico we are told of a peculiar crab which, in time, will grow another leg to replace a destroyed member; however, no more legs will grow if the body of the crab is destroyed. The "old man" is very deceitful and will play dead only to rise up and give trouble later. "Inbred sin will not relinquish its hold on our spiritual nature by mere hints or signs or resolutions. Do not think you can shout it out or frighten it away by a few jumps. Carnality fastens its awful fangs on the human soul and grips the very fiber of your being and buries its talons in the innermost part of your moral nature. It will never go until the mighty power of God comes upon the soul and bids it to depart. If you are sanctified by the Omnipotent energies of the Holy Ghost you will be freed from inbred sin."

II. We are called upon to lay aside every weight. We are not only to get rid of "the sin," but there are weights which hinder our progress in the Christian life. Let us notice some of the weights which we are to lay aside. The spirit of discouragement is one weight. A heavy heart is its own weight. "There is something about the cherishing or brooding over sorrow that paralyzes all religious power and activity. The heart freezes, the mind becomes dull, and the tongue stiffens, the hands and feet feel like lead, and the life fairly stagnates." Let a preacher enter the pulpit with this weight upon his soul, and he cannot be at his best for God. In spite of his efforts his spirit will drop, and the congregation will go away unblessed and unfed. If we allow the spirit of gloom to possess us, we will become lifeless and useless. On the other hand, if we keep filled with light, love, and joy there will be inspiration, stimulus, push, and force in our life and message.

Another weight is the spirit of criticism. "There is no disposition of the soul which more quickly and completely destroys the flavor of holy love than the spirit of criticism. The critical spirit eats out, like a burning acid, the very sweetness of spiritual life. There is a mysterious quality of heart-gentleness and

mental and soul-sweetness in a truly crucified believer, which cannot be defined. It is a thousand times beyond mere sanctification orthodoxy. It is the breath of Jesus in the heart, the vapor from the River of Life, the perfume of the rose of Sharon, the elixir of prayer, the marrow in the bone of truth, which is far more in the sight of God than all the outward hulls of religious form and teaching which only serve as the alabaster box to this divine spikenard of heavenly love. But one hour of critical thinking, or one severe utterance in a critical spirit, will strike through this inward purity and sweetness like a touch of gall."

This is a weight which must be laid aside, or we will come short of the purpose and plan of God. The spirit of fear will prove a weight to your soul. Fear clouds your mind, blurs your vision until you see things all out of proportion. This was what led to Israel's defeat at Kadesh-Barnea. They magnified their difficulties, talked giants and walled cities until all they could see was giants and towering walls. Fear a fear and it will come upon you. If you entertain the thought of failure, you will fail. Fear a crowd and you will get stage fright. Fear people and you will get in bondage to them. The fear of failure has hindered hundreds of revivals. Ministers and religious people are afraid to venture forth for fear that they might fail. This is a weight that must be laid aside or it will clip your spiritual wings.

Let us note that this race is to be run with patience. We will miss the mark, we will fail to win the goal unless we possess our soul in patience. "Patience is necessary in our spiritual discipline, in the education of our higher character, in overcoming habits of sin, in perfecting all the graces of divine life." Patience is the mother of those beautiful graces which adorn the sanctified life. Perfect love is introduced to us as long-suffering and kind. The great work of the Holy Ghost is to cleanse the heart of all roots of bitterness and plant in us all the mind which was in Christ Jesus. The lack of patience is what robs us of our victories and weakens our faith, clouds our soul vision, hinders our prayer life, and steals our unction and fire. The sainted Will Huff stated: "Believe me, friends, it is not the outstanding vulgar, vicious things that rob men and women of their unction, power, and fire. Those are not the things that endanger us. I am speaking to men and women today who would scorn the vulgar and smutty. It is those heartbreaks with God that strangle the spiritual life, or kill your soul with a creeping paralysis that puts the light out of your soul until your face is like a blown out lamp. Greater is he that can keep the citadel of his will than he that can take a city. Greater is he that can let the other man have the last word than to have it himself. The greatest right you can have sometimes is not to claim your right at all." Then if I am to run this race with patience, I must have some work done in me that will take out of me that gun-powder-like nature and put within me a lamb-like, dove-like spirit that will keep calm and sweet under all circumstances.

Now, the incentive: We are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses. The galleries of heaven 'are full of the heroes of faith. It fills my soul with joy to know that the skies are filled with the blood-washed of all ages who are watching me run. They are interested in our successes. They rejoice in our victories. This is enough to encourage us to buckle on the armor a little tighter and run the race a little swifter.

But the keynote of the entire passage lies in these words, "Looking unto Jesus" -- the file-leader. The file-leader is one who blazes the way through the forest. Back in the earlier days of American history when the settlers were making their way westward to settle on the free Grant reserve, the pioneer or the file-leader always went ahead on a swift horse, blazing the way through the forest, finding springs of water for the oncoming multitudes in their covered wagons.

This world was like a moral forest. Humanity had lost its way, but Jesus, our file-leader, came and blazed the way through the wilderness and went on up to Calvary and there opened up a highway of holiness and hung up a light on Calvary's hill which will shine and burn forever. And while His pure body was still

hanging on the Cross He descended to the regions of darkness and figuratively speaking, walked up and hurled the prince of darkness into the ashes of hell and said, "I am he that was dead but I am alive forever more." Then on the resurrection morning He arose with a shout of victory, "All Hail," "All Power," ascended on high and took His place at the right hand of God. There He sits undisturbed by the doings of men and devils. Not a devil can tempt, not a disease can strike you without His permission. "Looking unto Jesus." It was while we were looking to Jesus that He gloriously saved us, sweetly pardoned us, and a peace like a river broke into our soul.

Then at the second look for cleansing He completely sanctified us wholly and gave us the abiding Comforter which brought heaven into the soul. Again we look to Jesus for perfect conformity to Him in all things. "We may have pardoned and purified hearts, and yet the outward life is left with all its manifold features of speech and actions, looks, tones, gestures, bearings, manners, and scores of other things that need to be corrected and changed. Sanctification means great light but not all light as some would make it. It means perfect love, but not a perfect head by any manner and means. It means that the sin principle is destroyed out of the soul, but does not mean that we cannot grow in grace within or be improved in our ways and manners without. The thing to do is to look to Jesus with the question: 'What would He say, and what would He do under the circumstance which surrounds us?' Nor should we be discouraged in not obtaining all the light at once. We are to keep looking and blessed will be the result to ourselves and marked will be the improvement in the eyes of those who are proper judges of spiritual things."

We need to look to Jesus for inward divine guidance. There are certain conditions upon which God promises to guide His children. One is that we "acknowledge the Lord in all of our ways." That means to put God first in business, pleasure, marriage, and all the details of life. The next is that we "lean not to our own understanding, and he shall direct our path." Notice we are not to lean to our own understanding. No matter how long in the experience we have been, how many battles we have fought, we cannot fall back on past experience. Right here is where many a saint has got out of divine order. They feel that they have done so much for the Lord that they can rely on past experiences. They let up in prayer and become careless, quit practicing self-denial until they lose the lighting out of their soul. This was the case with Samson and his backslidings. He began to depend upon his former strength until he went back on his Nazarite vows which stood for separation from the world, and trifled with a woman's affection, and, in the language of Holy Writ, "He wist not that the Lord had departed from him."

"Time would fail to tell of preachers and laymen who ran well for a season, and then gradually or suddenly their triumphant career was ended. There have been a number of evangelists who fairly blazed for awhile, and then their light began to wane, and finally, in some instances, went out altogether. Among these names were some prominent ones. They had the ear of the people, drew multitudes, pulled down fire from Heaven, and yet after all this went into eclipse and darkness."

Volumes could be written here on God's deliverance, guidance, and protecting power. The writer is personally acquainted with three leading evangelists who had marvelous deliverance from personal injury by obeying the checks of the Spirit.

"Looking unto Jesus." Many years ago there lived in London, England, a master musician. One day while walking through the slum district he came across a little street urchin playing on the side of a bank. The musician found out where the mother of the boy lived and begged her for the boy. He promised to be good to him and educate him. The mother finally consented, and the boy was brought to the musician's home. He took him each day to his studio and taught him the first principles of music. Year after year he taught

him. The boy grew to be a noble young man and became a genius in music. He made his first operatic appearance at the age of twenty-one. The music lovers came from all parts of the country to see and hear him play. The master musician said to the young man, "Son, do not pay any attention to the people. You keep your eyes on me." The hour finally came when the curtains rose, and lights played on the young master. When he drew his bow across the violin the building seemed to vibrate with heavenly music. The crowd went wild with enthusiasm and applauded again and again, women threw bouquets at his feet; but he failed to notice them. Finally, someone near him noticed that he was gazing at an object in the balcony. They looked more closely and found that he had his eyes fixed on the old master who was standing in the top gallery. Friends, three worlds are witnessing our race. Whenever we are successful and victorious, Heaven rejoices, and hell mourns. Men may throw bouquets at us one day and stones the next, but we are to keep our eyes on Jesus, the file-leader and author of our faith.

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