

The Story of Jesus - From the Cross to a Crown

Hebrews 12:1–2

12 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.

Can you imagine? It's cold and damp. The hay, soft yet spiky, pokes and makes sitting and lying uncomfortable. The aroma of farm animals fills the air. The space is small unkept made for horses and cattle to sleep not for humans to call a room and definitely not a place to give birth to a baby. The agony of child birth is expressed through Mary's shout. The nervous father only holds her hand in comfort because he has no idea what else to do. The noise causes the animals to rustle. The scene gets intense soon Joseph is squeezing her hand harder than she is gripping his and with a final shout Mary gives birth...the child is here...the once restless animals all now stand at attention...their creator has just entered the room...the once cold dark and damp manger...a barn...is now full of the glory of the king of kings. God has become flesh...they give the baby a name...we shall call him Jesus for he is to be the savior of the world.

Today we celebrate Jesus...he didn't enter the world like a king...he didn't demand the spotlight or make a big fuss...yet he was born fully God and fully man...with a purpose...to be the savior of the world...to die for our sins.

Why do we need a savior? Because in the beginning Adam, created by God from the dust of the ground, sinned against God by being disobedient. When told the one restriction in the garden God established for him, he crossed that boundary and ate from the tree that was off limits and we are born with that inheritance, we are born in sin and sinful by nature...and you can't deny it...it separates you from God...and the bible tells us the wages of sin is death...we deserve to die, we deserve to live outside of the presence of the Lord...but because God loves us so much, he provided a way for us to fix what Adam had broken.

The text we are looking at today I believe summarizes the authenticity of Jesus and the response we should have to what he has already done.

What I want us to see from the text today is that though there is a cross, and everyone must deal with crosses in their life, for those who place their faith in Jesus Christ, there is waiting for us a crown.

There are three points I want to make today from this passage...

1. You are not the first person to be tested by life.

Hebrews 12:1a "Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses..."

When life hits you, Satan wants you to believe that you are the only one experiencing this pain, you are the only person having to deal with that trouble. He wants to isolate you so that he can devour you, but what you need to know is that you are not the first person to have their heart broken. You are not the first person to lose a loved one. You are not the first person to experience financial trouble...to have bills due...many have gone before you who can tell you they have been through your pain and have seen God show up on their behalf.

The writer says...We have a cloud of witnesses who can tell you their story of being tested and how they made it through.

The writer of Hebrews is about to give out instructions, and those instructions are based on the fact that we have encouragement to draw on, some people who are living proof that what I am asking you to do is possible.

A great cloud of witnesses...it's the picture of standing in the stadium and the crowd is looking down on you. We have their life to learn from...their mistakes to avoid...we have their faith to build on as an example.

What witnesses are we talking about? He is referring to the witness testimonies he just mentioned in chapter 11. Noah – who when faced by rain constructed an ark, Abraham – who when he was called to go to an unknown place, did as he was told, Sarah – who was given power to conceive even after she was past child bearing age, Moses – who by faith left Egypt and prosperity to lead his people through the desert to the promise land. Rahab – a prostitute used by God to save His people, David – the little shepherd boy who stood against Goliath. And so many others mentioned in Hebrews 11. These are the witnesses. These are the cloud that surround us and cheer us on. You can do this!

As we are walking through life we have to know that trouble and test did not start in the 21st century. People have been living on faith in God for a long time. People have been relying on God a long time, and when we look at the witnesses and they tell us their testimony, we can see I am not in this by myself.

When I was playing football in high school, every once in a while I would look up in the stands and see my uncles and father and remember the story of their hard work and their success and how they beat the odds, and it helped me to push a little harder. It helped me run a little faster. It helped me be a little stronger because their witness, their testimony helped me know if they could do it I could too.

This text is telling us if Abraham could walk by faith, you can too. If Joseph could go from being in prison to being a prince, you can too. If Moses can go from being a murderer to a messenger, you can too. If Rahab can go from being a prostitute to being used for God, you can come from any walk of life, any back ground, any mess, and be a miracle. Why?

1-Because you are not the first person to be tested by life.

2. You are not going to move forward until you deal with the real issue.

When you are born, you are born in sin. Since the creation of Adam, we are sinful by nature, we mentioned this in the intro to this message. We don't have to be taught how to sin. We don't have to teach babies to be selfish or to fight over stuff.

That's just the beginning. Later in life, we get to the point where we know right from wrong and we choose to sin. That sin grabs us and covers us so that we make decisions and operate out of an entangled mindset.

The second half of Verse 1 says... let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely. This is telling us, there are a couple of things that keep us in our rut, a couple of specific matters that keep us from moving forward. He said to 1st lay aside every weight some versions say encumbrance. Then he said we should lay aside the sin which clings so closely, some versions say that entangles us.

Lay aside every weight. The word weight here is like baggage that loads us down keeping us from pressing forward. It's the picture of runners who would use extra weight to work out with and then when the race started, they would lay it aside, because the weight hindered them from moving forward.

The writer said, the thing that broke you down, let it go so you can see your new found strength. The baggage you have been carrying around, let it go so you can run forward. That grudge, that bad habit, that broken promise...let it go.

Also, the writer tells us to lay aside the sin that clings so closely or get untangled from sin. His point is sin traps you and doesn't want to let go...you know how you go to your junk drawer to get that one cord you have been looking for and when you see it, it is wrapped around another wire that is wrapped around another cord and they are so tangled you can't tell where one ends and the other begins. This is how he describes what sin does to us. It grips us and entangles us so that we are so caught up in the wrongs we have done, we cannot see a way out.

1 Thessalonians 5:23 Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

This verse tells us we are spirit, soul and body the problem we have is we try to fix our messed up entangled lives by trying to fix our outward situation and because our problem comes from our sin scarred entangled soul, no matter how much outward fixing we do, we never get to the root of the problem and we live lives unproductive and empty and the only way to be freed is to lay aside the baggage and get untangled from the sin.

It's like a mouse trap, you try to pull away and it won't let go it traps you.

You try to pull away and the lies you told pull you back...the unforgiving heart pulls you back...the grudge you are holding onto pulls you back...your anger with God because of what happened to you in life, it pulls you back and you will never move forward because you are trapped by a scarred soul.

Rather, the later part of verse 1 says of Hebrews 12, let us run with endurance the race that is set before us,

We are told to “Run the race with endurance”...this is the goal. This word run means more than living life to live, it means live with purpose. Run not like you are just trying to finish, living for the weekend, but run like you know you are going somewhere.

It also says to run the race that is set before you. You have a lane of life that is for you. The problem most of us have is that we want to run the race that was set before our neighbors. We want to run the race that is set before the athlete or the movie star on tv. We want to run the race to get rich...we want to run the race to make a name for ourselves...instead of running the race God set before us which he blesses when it is done to bring Him glory. If you seek to bring God glory, he will order your steps. When you seek to bring God glory, he will open doors for you. When you seek to bring God glory. He will guide you into exactly what he wants you to be and there you will find your purpose and fulfillment.

As a pastor I often counsel people and visit people on their death bed. Not once have I talk to one who said I wish I could buy one more car. Not once have I heard them say I wish I could have had a bigger house. What I have heard is I wish I could have spent more time with my family. I wish I could have made more of a difference. I hope that I have fulfilled my purpose.

God has designed you with a goal... Jeremiah 29:11 For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.

His plan is to use you to accomplish his will, build families, raise your kids, make change in Kansas city. He wants to use you to help more people experience life, but he can't use you if you are so set on your own goal that you don't seek him for his goal for you.

When you watch track and field it would be odd to see a race get started and see runners just running and some run a hundred and stop, others run a whole lap then stop. Some run a mile then stop. When the race begins there is a specific goal set and the runners are pressing toward that goal.

Often God sets goals for us, but we continue to get sidetracked by materialism. God sets goals for us, yet we keep getting distracted by someone else's success, we keep getting entangled by our own sin which causes us to be weighed down by temporary stuff that only goes away.

And the bible is telling us to run...get untangled and run...put the burdens down and run with purpose. And we can't do that until we realize we can't move forward until we deal with our real issues.

1-You are not the first person to be tested by life. 2-You are not going to move forward until you deal with the real issue.

3. You have a savior who died so you can live.

Hebrews 12:2a “looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith,”

Ok, I can see it on your face...I hear you preacher...I know I have burdens...I know I have sin...I want to run...what do I do? What do I need to do to lose these chains?

The writer says... "look to Jesus" – literally means...to turn your eyes from other things and fix them on something else, to turn your mind from the things that want to distract you and turn your mind, turn your thinking to Jesus himself. In order to get untangled from what holds you back, you have to see Jesus as the only answer to your problems.

When Jesus was born in that manger he was born with an end in mind. He came to live and die. He came to be the answer to your question, how do I live, how can he give me life?

He can give you life because He is the founder of our faith, the author. This literally means the one who lead the charge...the chief.

Jesus took on a body to live on this earth in order to relate to our struggles and he was tempted yet he did not sin, setting the standard of holiness therefore qualifying himself to die for our sins, giving us the example to aim for.

He is also the perfecter or finisher of our faith. This word comes from the same root word that one of Jesus' famous words on the cross came from.

On the Cross Jesus said Tetelestai, it is one Greek word that means, It is finished. Basically, the work that was needed to make a way for spiritually dead people to live an abundant life is done.

Every meeting he was supposed to have was done. Every healing he was supposed to perform was done. Every test he had to endure was done.

He endured the cross because there was joy set before him. He saw the cross, but He saw the crown on the other side. He showed us that if we focus our attention on the temporary pain we won't experience the eternal breakthrough. It might hurt, but there is a brighter day.

My wife and I, before we moved to Kansas City, did a 20 mile bike ride...at the end red robin had a big giant grill and everyone that finished got a big juicy hamburgertowards the end of the race it was hard...my body hurt...my legs were tired....but the closer I got to the finish line...the stronger the smell got...I could see the burger...I could see the sesame seed bun...I could taste the crisp lettuce....before I knew it I had picked up speed and ran with endurance because the glory that was set before me was greater than my current pain....

Jesus could endure the cross...and the closer he got to the end the sweeter the glory became...he could see his seat...he could have confidence.

And I'm here to tell you that Jesus died so that you can have hope...the pain is hard...the people talk about you...the struggles are deep...but the closer you get to Jesus...the sweeter it gets...you began to look past the pain...and give praise...you began to look past the insults...and see a crown of righteousness...you began to look past the heartache...and see the glory of eternal life...you may have a cross...but for everyone that has a cross...there is a crown.

He could take the nails in his hand...because he knew he had a seat next to God...he could take the piercing in his side because he knew there was praise when it was over...he could take the crown of thorns because he knew he had a crown of glory when he got to heaven.

I don't know what you are dealing with today...I don't know what is your baggage...I don't know what sin is entangling you, but I have a solution...give your life to Jesus and watch him begin to peel the layers of hurt away little by little until you can experience abundant life.

Be encouraged, 1-You are not the first person to be tested in life. 2-You are not going to move forward until you deal with the real issue. 3-You have a savior who died so you can live. My word for you today, on this resurrection Sunday is, Let it go and let Him live in you!

And the Church said, Amen!