

Introduction to Hebrews 12:1-4

Sunday, June 6, 2016
Pastor Don Denyes

Finishing a task can be difficult. We work, but there is always more work to do. We build things to completion, but everything requires maintenance and the work is never finished. Solomon, the wisest man who ever lived, was discouraged at the thought that, in a sense, nothing we do is ever finished (Ecclesiastes 3:9-11). We run the race of faith, but we often despair and think about giving up.

Jesus is not like us. While He is every bit as human as we are, He finished the work needed for us to be saved—something we couldn't do for ourselves. In doing so, He finished His race. His devotion to God the Father led Him to be obedient all the way to the point of dying a criminal's death.

Context

The book of Hebrews is primarily concerned with painting a glorious picture of Jesus for all who read. It talks about His superiority to angels, His superiority to Moses, His superiority to Joshua and Melchizedek and every other priest who has ever lived. In chapter 11 of Hebrews, the author recounts the great people of faith whose stories are told in the Old Testament. In our passage to begin chapter 12, the author explains how Jesus is superior even to all of them, providing us with a pattern of faith and faithfulness for us to follow...

Structure

- I. Exhortation to Believers to Finish the Race (v.1)
- II. Celebration of Jesus' Example of Faith (v.2)
- III. Exhortation to Consider Jesus' Example (v.3-4)

Reflect *(Use this section to write down any insights you received from the sermon. Make sure to note any questions you had about something in the passage or in the sermon as well.)*

What Jesus Endured...

- Physical Pain
- Social Shame
- Spiritual Rage
- Judicial Wrath
- Filial Detachment (Separation from the Father)

Why He Endured Those Things...

- His Intention
- His Achievement

Discuss

- 1) Thinking of our study in Mark and this week's sermon from Hebrews, what do you admire most about Jesus? What about Him causes you to love Him more the more you think about Him?

- 2) Hebrews 12 offers us Jesus as the superior example of faith and faithfulness compared with all of the people who went before Him. Who are some people in your life who may not live (have lived) a perfect life of faith like Jesus, but offer an example/contribute to your "cloud of witnesses" who encourage you in your faith?

- 3) Pastor Don mentioned that there are often good things which can hinder us from "running the race." What might be some things in your life that, while they might be good or neutral in and of themselves, could or do prevent you from growing in your faith in and love for God?

- 4) The passage also talks about the "sin that so easily entangles." What sins easily entangle us today? How does Jesus' example encourage us to resist it/them (v. 4)?

- 5) Jesus offers us an example of how to endure suffering. One form of suffering He endured was social shame. Is there any social shame associated with being a Christian in today's world? What does that look like?

Go Deeper *(This section is especially for leaders to consider as they prepare for the Growth Group meeting)*

Gospel Connections: Jesus, although He is said to “endure” the cross, did not do so apart from joy. Just like the “heroes of faith” portrayed in chapter 11, Jesus was able to endure it because He knew something greater awaited beyond it. For us, the gospel is good news because it restores our relationship with God, but also because it gives us joy in the midst of very real suffering. The gospel is all about our joy and happiness being found *in God*. It does not promise us joy and happiness in all of our circumstances, but it does promise that our ultimate joy can be found in relationship with God through Jesus. That is why we endure by taking up our “crosses” (Mark 8:34).

Whole Bible Connections: As Hebrews 11 demonstrates, the Old Testament is full of examples of faithful people who did great things and suffered great loss for the sake of their commitment to obeying the LORD. This kind of exemplary faith shows that, despite humanity’s sin and rebellion, there has always been a remnant of people who try to treat God as God and obey His word. Yet we know from all of their individual stories that those people failed to live perfect lives of faith in God. Jesus went beyond all of them, demonstrating faith in (and faithfulness to) God of which all people before could only offer a shadow, and which all people after must follow.

Theological Connections: Jesus essentially accomplished three main things on the cross. First, He took our place, bearing the penalty we deserved for our sin such that He satisfied the wrath of God. Second, He defeated His (and our) greatest enemies: Satan, Sin, and Death. We cannot possibly underemphasize the importance of these two accomplishments. But there is a third accomplishment that we often underemphasize: Jesus gave us the perfect example of faith in God and of love toward others. When Jesus died on the cross, He proved to be the truly obedient Son of God. According to Hebrews 12:3 and following, Jesus’ faithfulness, displayed on the cross, is now our model to follow as we turn from sin and commit ourselves in faith to God. He also proved the limit of self-sacrificing love for others is far beyond where many of us are willing to go in our lives.