

A Holy Race

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[0 : 00] So, Ryan is here this morning. Most of you know Ryan.

! And I'm really excited because Ryan is going to come and bring the word for us this morning. And I'm excited. I've enjoyed having him and Amy and the kids as a part of our church and a part of our church family. And I have known for a while that Ryan is a preacher. That he can preach and he can teach.

And so I'm excited this morning because I get to hear him preach and teach. But mostly I'm excited because we get to receive the word of God this morning. And so I'm going to hand things over to Ryan.

And we look forward to hearing from the Lord. Thanks. I'm grateful to be here today. Just in case you haven't noticed, I mean, Chris grew out his beard just so he could have a week off.

That's what I think is going on. But no, really, I don't think he's having a week off because I'm very thankful for him for mentoring me and guiding me. And I thank God for having a pastor who will invest in the other men amid the congregation. And so I am eternally grateful for him.

[1 : 25] My in-laws are here as well. My mother-in-law, Dorothy, and father-in-law, Frank. And they have also poured into me over the last 18 years. Actually, I've been married 18 years tomorrow, which I just now figured out. And my wife is probably going, I think I'm going to kill you for bringing this up. But it pops out, extroverts do what extroverts do, right? So anyway, now, not to me, but let's look to the word of God. If you'll turn with me to Hebrews chapter 12, we're going to cover a lot of scripture. Because as you know, because you're a church of the cross, we look to scripture as our guide. And you don't want to hear as much as what I have to say is what the scripture is saying. So when you find it, if you'll stand and we'll read chapters 12, 1 through 11. 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, 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. Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted in your struggle against sin. In your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. And have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons? My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him. For the Lord disciplines the one he loves and chastises every son whom he receives. It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline? If you are left without discipline in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. Besides this, we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the father of spirits and live?

For they disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness. For the moment, for the moment, all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it. May God bless the reading of his word. You may be seated. So we are going to focus our efforts today on the first two verses of that chapter. The, therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and sin which clings so closely, and run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, for 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. Those two verses we're going to unpack. We're going to unpack it in reverse order. We're going to look at Jesus first in verse two. And, uh, because that's, uh, that's the, what you need to know is that the last 11 chapters before that, that's what the writer of the, of Hebrews, uh, is, has just unpacked for them is that Jesus is the author and perfecter

of their faith, that he, uh, he, he, uh, is our great high priest, that he laid down his life as a propitiation for our sins, as a payment for our sins. That's what he just unpacked through the, the previous 11 chapters. And we're going to look at some of those. So that way, so that way, uh, you know, the exact context. Um, but first I want you to think, cause I was thinking about this last, this last week, about a time, uh, you know, we were in Sunday school, we've been going through judges and before that, uh, the, the, the, uh, the, the, the books of the law and Genesis. And that's what we've kind of been going through. And, uh, it's fascinating to look at judges and Joshua and the way Israel responded, the cycle, the, the, uh, fallen into sin, crying out for, for God, uh, and then him redeeming them with, through a judge. We saw that through judges. Um, and it, it, it's, uh, I couldn't help but think about that cycle that continues through the Kings almost, um, except for it seems that they fall fewer and fewer between when they would cry out to God for release. But, but, uh, but the importance of the high priest in the life of Israel, the importance of it and how often they found themselves with either a King that was wretched or the high priest and their priests that were not doing their jobs. And, and, uh, and I was thinking about the time of Manasseh. I don't know if everybody knows who Manasseh was, but he was, he was a King of Judah who, who, uh, probably was the most vile King of them all and ever in Judah. He, uh, he actually sacrificed his son. Um, he, he, uh, he worshiped a Moloch. He, uh, probably worshiped Baal too, since Baal is always around. But, but, uh,

I imagine the remnant in Israel, uh, uh, and there was always a remnant. We've just been looking at that in Romans that there was always a remnant. And I imagined what their life must've been like when they realized that they didn't have a high priest who was, who is, uh, doing his job, that he was representing them to God, that he wasn't sacrificing the way he should. We know this because Josiah, Manasseh's grandson, uh, uh, repented and tore down all the altars. And then they cleaned out the temple and they said, here's this book. They found the book of the law and they worshiped God. He repented of that. And they had, uh, a great Passover, a Passover that hadn't been as great since, uh, since even the days of David.

And I just imagine what it was like for a faithful, for our faithful brethren at the time to, to have not, to not know that their high priest was standing before God for them, that he was offering those sacrifices they need. So we're going to look at that here in a minute, but mostly, uh, if you'll turn with me to the very beginning of Hebrews, and we're going to look and see the context that we're talking about here. Um, the first thing that we're looking at is, is, uh, in verse three in chapter one, and it's this one you've probably memorized. I know the youth that were looking at it and on Wednesday evenings, um, it's a, it's a great verse. It's just that, uh, uh, he is the radiance of the glory of God, the exact imprint of his nature. And he upholds the universe by the word of his power, making purifications for the sins. He sat down at the right hand of God, of the majesty on high, having become, uh, as much superior to the angels as the name of his inheritance.

[8 : 26] Jesus is God. That's what the writer of Hebrews starts out with. By the way, I say the writer because no one knows who wrote Hebrews. Uh, but we do know that he was writing to Hebrews.

Uh, and, and that is what's important here and what we're looking at. So, so he, the writer of Hebrews, he is writing about Jesus and he says that he is God. Now flip over to chapter two, verse 17 and 18. Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God to make propitiation for the sins of the people for because he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted. Jesus was tempted in the desert. You know, the story 40 days, but he was also tempted. Uh, we think all his whole life to sin, but he never gave in. He was perfect. He, he was able to become, uh, he's able to be a sympathetic high priest because he was tempted.

And with yet without sin, he was perfect. Look at, uh, Hebrews chapter three, verse three, Hebrews chapter three, verse three, for Jesus has been counted worthy of more glory than the Moses as much more glory as the builder of a house as more honor than the house itself. Jesus was the high priest and, and he gave a, he was perfect. And not only that was that he was better than Moses. That's really hard for an Israelite to say. You can't be better than Moses, right? Moses was the one that led them out of Egypt, but Jesus was better than Moses. Look at, uh, Hebrews seven, 22 through 28.

This makes Jesus the guarantor of a better covenant. The former priests were many in number because they were prevented by death from continuing in office, but he holds his priesthood permanently because he continues forever. Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost.

Those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them for it was indeed fitting that we should have such a high priest, holy, innocent, unstained, separated from centers and exalted above the heavens. He has no need like those high priests to offer sacrifices daily for, for his own sins.

[10 : 44] And those are those of the people since he did this once for all, when he offered up himself. Um, sorry, and 28 for the law points men and their weaknesses. It's high priest, but the word of the oath, which came later than the law points a son who has been made perfect forever. Jesus was perfect. He gave himself up. He lived those lives and he lives today. He didn't, he died, but he didn't, he didn't stay dead. He rose on the third day. And because he did that, he can be a high priest forever.

Not just a human that, that, uh, was fallible who, who, uh, who caved under pressure and who dies, but he lives forever. So he was, he's able to make intercession forever.

Look at, uh, the next verses, uh, Hebrews 9, 11 through 12. But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent, not made with hands, that is not of this creation, he entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of blood of goats and calves, but by the means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption. The, the tabernacle and the temple were shadows. The law was a shadow of things to come. We see that also in Hebrews, that it was a shadow and that Jesus died and cleansed the, the real temple in heaven. And he's entered and now he is sitting at the right hand of God. He's, he's there securing an eternal redemption for his people. He's there making, uh, making the perfect, having made the perfect sacrifice. It's now our high priest. Look at, uh, skip down to verse 24 of chapter nine. And every piece of the priest stands daily at a service offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But when Christ had offered all for all time, a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God, waiting from that time until his enemies should be made a footstool for his feet. For by a single offering, he has perfected for all time, those who are being sanctified. So there's two things there in that last part. He's perfected for all time. So he is made a payment in which the, which, uh, has taken our lives. Those of his saints, those who believe in Jesus, you have been, you have been made perfect for all time, but no, not right now. You're being sanctified.

If you look at that second part of that is you were in the process of being made perfect. You were, you have the position in which you were in Jesus and Jesus's blood covers your sins and you are forgiven.

And so you have been perfected, but you are not perfect right now. You are in the process of being sanctified. And so that's, uh, that's what we're really talking about today is your sanctification.

[13 : 53] See, for all of those who trust in Jesus, you have been forgiven. I can't say that enough. You have been forgiven. Your life is now not your own, but it's Jesus's life though. And you live it in, in sanctification. Look at, uh, Hebrews chapter, uh, I'm sorry, actually, we're going to go back to 12 now, uh, 12 one. So, so Jesus looking to Jesus again, 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. So look that again, that he's the perfecter of our faith, that he's the founder and that he had joy set before him.

The joy is that he had accomplished his mission. He was accomplishing his mission and he's going to be set at the right hand of God. That was the joy, but there was something in the way, despising the shame. That was our sin that he was going to take upon himself. That was the shame of being on the cross naked. That was the shame of being beaten. That was the shame of all of that, uh, all of the, he had to endure, but he still was doing it in joy and that, uh, he endured the cross in joy.

The joy knowing that he was going to, to be the faithful high priest, that he was going to be seated at the right hand of God, making intercession for us daily for his people that God had given him. So what kind of race do we, do we run? We know that Jesus finished his race, that, that he was, made it through the cross that he made, uh, he made the perfect sacrifice that he made the penalty. He paid the penalty, redeemed his people and is now sitting at the right hand of God. So what kind of race do we run? How now shall we live is what it's been said over and over again.

That is, uh, how now shall we live is, uh, an interesting thing there. The, the race, the word for race is agon. That's the Greek word for race. Um, it's where we get the word agony, struggle. It could be troubled. Uh, it could be, it could be a translated struggle. Um, and, and that's a, that's a fascinating thing. It really changes how you look at the race that we're winning. And the, now the question is, is

what is the race? What is that? What, uh, what are we doing here? Um, well, we're going to look, cause Hebrews says a lot about that too. Let me, let me direct you to Hebrews chapter, uh, 10 right now and 15. What kind of race do we run? Well, 10, 15 says that, and the Holy spirit also bears witness to us saying for, for, for, for after saying, this is the covenant I will make with them. After those days declares the Lord, I will put my laws in their hearts and write them on their minds. And then he adds, I will remember their sins and their lawless deeds no more where there's forgiveness of these. There's no longer any offering.

[17:10] for sin. So the kind of race we run is a holy race. One filled with the Holy spirit, writing laws on our hearts and, uh, and, and writing them on our minds, convicting us, building us. Why? Because our sins have been forgiven and now we are Jesus. Um, Galatians two, well, let's, uh, sorry, let's get down to Hebrews chapter 10, 32 and 39. So, so, but recall the former days when, after you were enlightened, you endured a hard struggle with sufferings, sometimes being publicly exposed to reproach and affliction, and sometimes being partners with those so treated for you and compassion on those in prison. And you joyfully accepted the plundering of your property, since you knew that you yourselves had a better possession and an abiding one. Therefore, do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward for you have need of endurance so that when you have done the will of God, you may receive what is promised for yet a little while.

And the, and the coming one will come and will not delay, but my righteous one will shall live by faith. And if he shrinks back, my soul has no pleasure in him, but we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith and preserve their souls. So, so the race that we went, that we're running is not one that shrinks back, not one that turns away, but one that faithfully marches ahead. It's a Galatians 2, 2021. Don't, you don't have to turn there, but we run a race that's not ours, but our master's race. It is, we've been crucified with Christ and now I live, but it's not that I live, it's that Christ lives in me. And that's the race we, we run. We run one that is, that is our master's race. And, and one that, which we will be faithful and continue on. You probably know Hebrews chapter 11. You probably have read it hundreds of times, but it's known as the hall of fame of faith, right?

It's got all of these listed here. Just, just scroll through Hebrews 11 right now. Look it up. Abel. It's got Abraham. It's listing Noah. It lists Sarah. It lists all of these great ones.

Once we've just recently covered in, in Sunday school, all of these heroes of the faith. Why are they heroes of the faith? Because they didn't shrink back because they continued on in faith because God had done this great work in them and, and was, and was continuing on. Let's look, let's look now at Ephesians chapter four. We run a race that is righteous and holy. Look at Ephesians chapter four real quick.

Ephesians chapter four, verse 17 through 24. Now this I say and testify in the Lord that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do in the futility of their minds. They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of their ignorance that is in them due to their hardness of heart. They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to, to practice every kind of impurity. But that is not the way you learned Christ. Assuming that you have heard from him and were taught in him as the truth is in Jesus to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds and to put on the new self created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness. The word there back at, back at, in Hebrews chapter two, the looking, the looking to Jesus, what kind of race we win? We're looking to Jesus.

[21:22] The looking is the word *aphoreo*. I might've just totally butchered how you say it, but, but the word is, is you stop looking at something and you turn and look to Jesus.

You stop looking at your former life. You stop looking at the fleshly desires that you, and the way you lived before. You stop being like the Gentiles do in this Ephesians passage.

Instead, you look to Jesus, who is the author and perfecter of your faith. It's now you turn from the way you were and you look to Jesus. It's much more of just, hey, I see the clock up there where I see you. It's, it's, it's, I'm changing from the, from, from my angle of the way I'm going to and looking at you.

I'm turning from my sin and from my lawless deeds from that way. And now I am striving after Jesus. Turn with me now to first Timothy chapter six. I told you there'd be lots of verses. I would apologize, but it's God's word and I'm pretty sure it's good. Chapter six, verse 11.

[22 : 40] But as for you, O man of God, flee these things, pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness, gentleness.

Fight the good fight of faith. Okay. Fight there. That, uh, not, not the first fight, the second fight. Fight the good fight. The good fight. Fight is agon.

It's struggle. It's the race. Fight the race. Fight the fight. Obviously he's using the fight metaphor here. So it got translated fight, but it's fight the good fight of the faith.

Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called and about which you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses. I charge you in the presence of God who gives life to all things and of Christ Jesus who is in the testimony before, who in his testimony before Pontius Pilate made the good confession to keep the commandment unstained and free from reproach until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Okay. Look at, uh, the, the, that you're going to take hold of eternal life. That's, uh, God has saved you. Jesus has saved you and delivered you. And now you pursue him. That's the look, look to him.

[23 : 56] And, uh, and not only that, but look here, he says the good confession and presence of many witnesses. Now we've seen that, right? We haven't covered that part in Hebrews chapter 12, but we talked about the witnesses.

Now, now, now Hebrews 12, if you'll go back there now, Hebrews chapter 12 is, is obviously the, uh, what we're focusing on today. So we have Hebrews 12. It really helps I get to the right page. Here we go.

Hebrews chapter 12 is the, uh, so Hebrews chapter 12, the, uh, the, here we go.

Therefore, uh, chapter two, verse 12, 12, two, 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 God, uh, right hand of the throne of God.

It's going to be back there. All right. So, so, um, the, therefore verse one brain is all kinds of jumbled for a second. So here we go. Ready? Verse one. 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.

[25 : 17] We've already discussed that, that we are laying aside the sin, which clings so closely. That was the, the, the turning off of our old self and putting on our new self that, that we have this opportunity to no longer look to our own fleshly desires.

Instead, we lay it aside and we seek after God and, and we look to Jesus. Jesus. So the cloud of witnesses, we just looked at the, that, that, that, uh, Paul and Timothy makes the, uh, statement about the witnesses.

Well, let me, let me lead you to Deuteronomy 17, six. Um, if you can look at that for just a second, because we're going to talk about the witnesses. Who are these witnesses and what are they doing? Doing well, the witnesses, I think are the people in Hebrews chapter 11, the faithful, uh, body of believers that have accomplished their race.

Now, um, that have accomplished their mission and they're cheering, cheering us on is what a lot of people said. I've looked at, uh, numerous, uh, commentaries and they were all that they are cheering you on, but I want to show you something different about these witnesses.

To me, I found during this last week. So if you could, uh, follow me over to Deuteronomy chapter 17. On the evidence of two witnesses or three witnesses, the one who is to die shall be put to death.

[26 : 42] Our person shall not be put to death on the evidence of one witness. The hand of the witnesses shall be against him to, to put him to death and afterwards the hand of all people. So you shall purge the evil from your midst.

Okay. Before you go crazy and you go, Ryan, where's the grace? We're going to get there. Okay. But, but look at the law, look at the law. That's what they were doing. They were the, that, that was by the law.

The witnesses had to be the first to throw the stone if they were going to stone somebody, but they were to be right there and they started it. Right. But why were they there? Look at why they're there. Cause that's, that's the important part.

So you shall purge the evil from your midst. It's never been tolerated to enjoy sin. It's always been, you want to get rid of sin to purge evil.

So look at Hebrews chapter 10 now, 28 through 31. So Hebrews chapter 10, 28 through 31.

[27 : 45] Anyone who has set aside the law of Moses dies without mercy on the evidence of two or three witnesses. How much worse punishment do you think will be deserved by the one who has spurned the son of God and has profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified and has outraged the spirit of grace?

For we know him who, who said, vengeance is mine. I will repay. And again, the Lord will judge his people is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. So, so he references there in the, in the prior thing here that, that, that, that on the hands of two or three witnesses that people were put to death.

Right. That's the same kind of witnesses we saw in Deuteronomy. That's the same exact thing. He's referencing the law here. And then he said, how much greater is it that you trample underfoot the blood of Jesus?

But then he calls them, but then he says that they are, they are sons. How much more do you think that you deserve by the one who spurned the son of God has profaned the blood of the covenant by which was sanctified?

For we know him who said, vengeance is mine. I will repay the Lord. I will repay. And again, the Lord will judge his people. He's going to judge us, but he's in the process of doing that as we live now, sanctifying you.

[29 : 11] He does not want you to remain in your sin. He does not want you to, to not grow any deeper. And he wants you, according to the verse in Hebrews that we're looking at, to look to him because he paid it.

He is there representing you to God the Father at the right hand. And he is, he is there. He is there representing you as the great high priest.

And you are not to be left the way you were, but in the process of sanctification, in the process of discipling, you are growing and you are leading, letting go of the sins that cling so closely.

You are now not your own, but you are Christ's. That is grace as well. That is grace. We read in Romans saying that, that, that, that, that should we sin now more so that way grace will increase? Well, Paul answers, obviously that's no. And, and, and we don't live a life of sin and idolatry. We don't. We live a life that is seeking after God with our own, all our hearts.

[30 : 29] We have the Holy Spirit living within us, writing his laws on our hearts. I, uh, fortunately, look at Hebrews 12 again.

We're going to go on to verse three though right now. Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself so that you may not grow weary or faint hearted in your struggle against sin. You have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. And have you forgotten the exhortation and addresses you as sons? My son do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him.

For the Lord disciplines the one he loves and chastises every son whom he receives. He addresses you as sons. He's talking to the sons here. He's, he's talking to those who believe that, and that he is not going to leave you as you are.

He's, he, he desires for you to let go of your sin. This week I, uh, on, I had Monday off at work. And so I worked, uh, Tuesday through Saturday.

[31 : 35] And, uh, on, on Tuesday I saw, uh, I work in, it's basically concrete everywhere. There's really, there's, there's a couple of trees here and there and some planned little areas.

But, uh, there's this little crevice in, right there next to where I work. And, and there's a, a, um, I kid you not, it's a foot long weed just growing out in the middle of this concrete jungle.

Um, I was singing Goo Goo Dolls all week, you know, the paved paradise. Yeah, I told myself I wasn't going to mention that. But, but, uh, uh, put up a parking lot.

Um, anyway, the music guys are going, why did you do that? I, I don't know. So, so, so, so, but, but there, there, it's just sitting there.

And so the first day I go, wow, that's, that's a weed. And that's really weird. And the second day I come in and I'm like, it's now got a flower growing on it. It's just weird.

[32 : 31] And then the third day I pass by and I'm like, why hasn't somebody gotten rid of this weed? The fourth day I come by and I realize that there's another one down the street, just like about 20 feet down.

And that's what sin does. It just, it sits there and the temptation for us now is to go grace, grace, and we just ignore our little sins. We ignore that they're there.

We start to look, oh, look, see beauty in it. But the truth is, is that what we need to do is come along and go whack. It needs to be gone. Our lives need to be holy lives.

Peter says it this way, be holy for I am holy. He's quoting Isaiah. I think it's Isaiah. But he's quoting God. Be holy for I am holy.

And that's the lives. That's the race that we're running. And the witnesses that we have, they're standing around because they have finished the course. They have led faithful lives.

[33 : 33] And they know all too well that God wants them to be holy as well. And they're looking at us. And they didn't have the opportunity to have that faithful high priest while they were living.

So they're looking at us in just an amazement going, look, he's got, the church now has the faithful high priest. And he's looking down at them. I don't know if they're looking or not.

But they're witnessing that we have a great opportunity. That we have a race set before us.

And the witnesses as they did accomplish their race. And then they're encouraging us now to accomplish the same thing. And that is to run the race of holiness. To share the gospel.

To look to Jesus. To leave our sin behind. Let's pray. Let's pray.