

50. N. Oct 11, 1970 A.M.

A LOAD OR A LIFT

Heb. 12:1-2

INTRODUCTION:

" Therefore as we have a vast crowd of spectators in the grand stands, - let us ~~throw~~ off every impediment, and the sin that easily entangles our feet. And run with endurance the race ~~for~~ which we are entered. Keeping our eyes on Jesus, the perfect leader and example of faith, who instead of the joy which lay before him endured the cross with no regard for its shame and since has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God. "

The world is alive today with the pennant race. It is called the World Series. Men are interested around the world in the outcome of this race.

There is great charm about the passage of Scripture which I have chosen today. Because within it, there is an appeal to us. There is the mystery of the great cloud of witnesses. There is the description of the saint under the figure of a race. And there is the splendor of his great faith.

The outcome of the pennant race or the series rather for the Christian man is going to depend upon a few things.

Just what does your religion mean to you. Do you find life more meaningful, or is it more complicated because of it.

Are the things that you really believe and accept - things that are helping you in the race. Is it a real joy, or it is a burden. Is it a load

or a lift.

In the days of Isaiah 46:4, he described the situation in Babylon as very frustrating. The people were trying to load their false Gods, onto ox drawn carts. Religion amounted to nothing more than a lot of dead weight. This kind of religions is very much still with us. Many people find themselves much afraid today and are not able to enter the game of life. Isaiah had a promise that honest faith was found in God, even through your old age, to the gray hairs that you carry. That it will bear you up.

Here in our Text, the writer finds that the new life is beset by difficulties. They are so hard pressed that they struggle. And they wonder whether or not it is worth it. Whether or not they are going to make it.

I. Notice The Objective.

How does Paul study them. He makes an appeal to them, not to be cowards. Or to love ease. Instead he begins to tell them that the (good life) is going to be costly. That being a Christian is going to be exacting business. In fact, he is telling them that being a Christian is being a spiritual athlete.

He takes us out to the (stadium) where the ball game is going on. Or where the events are taking place. And finally they come to the races. And then the runners are ready for the race.

The Christian life, he said, is a race to be run. He changes the figure - it is a grim contest and you cannot hope to win except the price of the

struggle.

In affirming, the good life will cost you something - he continues. He does not say that your situation is unique or different. He says the life of faith has always been costly. And proceeds to tell them about some of the heroes of faith. And about what he is talking about in this race. Therefore he appeals and refreshes their minds. He opens this letter by saying, God having of old times spoken unto the fathers, prophets, by divers portions and manners. Hath in the end of the day spoken unto us through his son. God, and God's revelation of himself to man.

Now, he continues to show that God has not forgotten - nor has he neglected the nation or the earth. This is an underlying principle, that we need not to lose sight of as he comes to explain to them about the cost. He says very simply let us run the race. What race?

In speaking of Abraham he has declared that he looked for a city which hath the foundations whose builder and maker is God. Of the others he declared, these all died in the faith. Not having received the promises, but having seen them and greeted them from afar. And having confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims in the earth.

God is not ashamed to be called their God. For he has prepared for them a city. These all have had witnesses - born to them through their faith.

It is evidence then that the race which he urges upon those whom he writes is not a race that is out of sight, but a race that is toward a city. Toward Heaven.

To understand this race, the Bible begins with a garden. And the Bible closes in a city.

Now this is a great expression, in a heart of man there is a passion for the city. It is intended that it should be there, and God's ideal of a man is that he should take the garden and dress it. And it is for that ultimate city that men of the past have always hoped. Abraham left his home in Ur and set his face toward the city. A city that was beyond the grave. A city to be built with beautiful conditions.

Now the essential thing that we find in this city is the exclusion and the inclusion. Tears, mourning, pain are going to be experienced. The character of the fearful, unbelieving, the conduct, liars, will not be in that city. No opportunity for the evil, unclean, but in that city will be light and life.

He affirms that the heroes of faith who run this race will get their objective. Some of them were stoned. They were slain with swords. They wandered with sheep skins and goat skins. Destitute, afflicted, tormented.

In speaking of the Christian as a life with a race to be run, it is a strenuous game to be played. The saint will clash with conflict. When he tells us how they won, he makes it plain that their victory was due to the fact that they did not count their lives as dear unto themselves.

Paul uses the same language when he talks about the soldier and the battle.

How did these saints come by their conviction that to be a Christian

of fellow saints.

Did not Jesus say, strive to enter in. Strive as in a game.
Struggle as in a battle. Agonize. For many shall seek to enter and
shall not be able. They shall not be able, not because entrance is
not impossible, but because they were not willing to pay the price.

II. What Are Some Of The Handicaps

Just how are we going to run so as to win. It is plain (common sense)
we are to divest ourselves of all our handicaps.

In order to run the race, he says, let us (lay aside) What then are
we to lay aside. He says every weight and the sin that doth so easily
beset us.

What is the weight. Anything that hinders toward their goal. Learning
maybe a weight. Feeling maybe a weight. A dim vision may be a weight.
What would hinder you. Now for a moment, let us pry into this.

1 - First, we must avoid the handicap of sin. We must give up every known
wrong. Sin separates us from God and therefore is weakening.

Sampson remained loyal to the will of God. When he broke his vow to
God, he was as weak as any other man. Sin always produces weakness. And
it will handicap the man in his race - it will be a load. It will not lift.

2 - Second, every weight must be laid aside. There are certain practices

Sack race - Both put in - Burley Bag - race 25 yds -
Today - put on a Mayie & run for a Bus -
-6-

There may be fashions that will slow down an individual Christian.
And these little weights.

Sometimes the past-times, or the recreation we indulge in, as
Christians, may become a weight, and a load. As Christians we are out
to win the race.

Whatever helps we are to take on - whatever hinders, we are to throw
away. However innocent that something might be in itself. If I am going
to be a member on the world series team and win the game - then I must
put aside the weights. I am not going to be able to break all the rules
of training and spend the important hours in a beer tavern or some other

concentrate on next game - game plan - members of other club.
place of indulgence because it will lessen the efficiency of the athlete.

I remember reading a story of a farmer in Ohio who with a small shot
gun was able to kill a great American eagle. The farmer was amazed that
he was able to get near enough to kill such a bird with a small gun. This
bird was a magnificent creature. Measuring 7 feet from tip to tip. When
he examined the bird however, he found that an old steel trap was clinging
to one of his legs. Months perhaps, maybe even years before, somebody had
set a trap for the great bird and caught him. But the eagle broke away -
taking the trap with him. Now the trap had not killed him. But it had so
lowered his efficiency that he became an easy prey for his deadly foe. In
this way, we must throw away every handicap.

Years ago, farmers sometimes would trap wild geese and all they simply
had to do was put out corn in the field, set traps, attach the trap to a little
block of wood. Now this would not hold the goose down firm, so that he might
break his foot off, but it gave him just enough leway to flutter a little

distance before going down again. It was a handicap.

Now this is what he is trying to get across to us. We must put aside the sin and the needless weights that hold us back. And would cause us to lose the game of life.

During the first world war, one of the great handicaps of this nation was, that the soldiers were not trained. And because we did not have the efficient army and ammunition for war - many of the soldiers had to go out into battle without very much training. And the equipment and the labors - they were weights, loads.

Now the Christian soldier who goes into battle leaves his weights behind.

III. What Are Some Of The Helps.

According to our text will help us run the race at our best.

First, there is the forward look. He reminds us that this is a race set before us. Now that sounds a bit simple, I know.

But what he is telling us, is simply this, you can never win the race by merely running in circles. You cannot hope to win with your eyes turned backward.

Many years ago, not too many at that, I remember reading in the newspaper about a notable football player. In an outstanding game, he was a capable

Player. He got possession of the ball and he made a run of 70 yards. Now

it was a brilliant performance. Except for one reason. He was running in the wrong direction. He was running backward toward the enemies' goal instead of toward his own. Now we can hope to run well only as long as the forward look.

We could go back to the Old Testament for just a brief illustration on this. When the spies were sent out at Kadesh Barnea. They went in, they came back. Two reports were given. One was the minority report, and the other a majority report.

Now the majority report said the land is a fair land - it is a good land. The grapes are lucious, the rivers are beautiful. The valleys and the hills are full of vegetation and beauty, ^{BUT} There are walled (cities) and there are (giants).

Now the difference in the majority report and the minority report is where they placed that word but. The minority report put the but a little further on - and said the land is fair, the land is a good land, the grapes are lucious, the rivers are beautiful - the hills and the valleys are full of beauty, there are walled cities and there are giants, (but) God will give us the land.

We are going to make a contribution toward the building of a new city. They have a vision. They were looking forward.

2 Second, the realization that we are a part of a great team. Now this will be a help in the race. We are not really going to run this race alone by ourselves - we are really on a great team.

There are all about us those who see our visions, dream our dreams.
And this gives us great courage. We are a part of a great company.

Some of this company is at our elbows today. Others of this great company have already passed on in the great land beyond.

Our fellow Christians and the ones that have passed on, give us great heart in this conflict.

You remember the text says, therefore, let us also seeing we are
compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses run.

They are witnesses - they are spectators. And they give their testimony
to the reality that the race is worth the prize. They watch us.

Now this makes it easier for you to run the Christian race in the great knowledge that there are a great host of witnesses looking on. You stop by the 11th Chapter of Hebrews and you will know this. Able worshipped. Noah worked. Abraham obeyed. Isaiah and Jacob foretold. Moses chose, to be with the children of Israel. And the writer goes on and times fails him to tell you about Gideon, Barak, Sampson, David, Samuel, and the Prophets. This helps you to take courage. Is there faith in your heart today, that you are moving toward this great city.

Here is a great host that subdued, wrought, obtained, stopping the lives of lions, quenched, escaped, and were powerful.

Now let me remind you, the story is not ended. Saints, apostles, prophets, missionaries, ministers, Godly saints, fathers and mothers, men of today. Yes,

and sometimes the world laughs at men of faith. But he tells us that we are surrounded by this great group.

3 In the third place, It must be run with patience. There must be endurance.

The race is not a 100 yard dash. That is something that we very quickly cover and it is all over. Just in a few seconds.

It's a cross country run. The track kinda stretches out from sunrise to sunset and we need persistence. And we need to guard against fainting

for in due season Paul says, if we faint not.

World War II - several Aviators were shot down on a So. Pacific Island - Natives came to lead them to safety, fearful that it might be a Japanese trap. They walked with hesitation & fear. Planning an escape - until the Natives began to sing - "Onward Christian Soldiers".

Now the Christians all through the ages have had to show patience.

They know then the oneness in Christ that makes for peace & safety.

I think even the early church had to have a great deal of patience when they were running this race. Because there was one time that they seemed to have a load and a burden about the matter of the Gentiles. How was he going to be converted. The real question was around ritual and ceremony. Now the Jews disagreed about this question.

Now Peter had to give an account of his actions because he went to Cornelius and men were questioning. Could a Gentile discover the grace of God just like a Jew. And Peter bore witness to the truth of God. If then, God gave the gift to them, he gave the same to us. To grant repentance. In fact, that didn't settle the defense, they finally had to have a conference at Jerusalem. Would anyone have the courage to face the truth. Now Paul declared that wonders that had been wrought by God among the Gentiles. In a day, a new day, it broke out in the church. James declared similar truth. Because of that witness and that faith that was patient. And they

carried on, discovering that they would run the race with patience.

So many times we despair and we have our frustrations. And we even find people trying to separate our faith from the experiences of daily life. But our faith should bring us into harmony in living -

The profector of faith - we look to him not only for example but the one who is able to bring our faith to perfection. Looking to him is to look away from all else. Turning away from our handicaps.

You remember during the storm when the Disciples were pulling the ore of the little vessel but they were not getting anywhere. And they looked up and saw Jesus coming on the water. At first they thought it was a ghost and he replied, it is I, be not afraid. At that point Simon said, Lord, if it be thou - bid thou come to me on the water. And he bid him come. Simon climbed down out of the vessel and walked on the water. He looked away from everything else to his master. When he looked, he won. When he turned his eyes and fixed them on his difficulties, he began to sink. Now this is the way to run the Christian life.

Gilbert Dodds, sometime ago ran the fastest mile on record at that time. There were many thousand people applauding in his triumph, and there were yet other thousands who listened over the radio. And someone asked him about the secret of his victory. His answer was very ~~simple~~, and ~~sincere~~, "I asked God to help me every step that I took". Now this young runner, running the race knew something about the source of all power. The great application is that we must look unto Jesus. And we will be able to run our best. Look unto me, he invites. And we will be victorious. We will not have a load, but we'll have a lift.

The conclusion, the speed of the Christian life let us run. This implies action on our part.

We must run free of weights. The sin that besets us, that easily overtakes us. Let no Christian think for an instant that the moment he was

converted, all the tendencies toward sin departed. You are in a spiritual warfare.

Remember there is an appointed task - it is set before us.

Remember it will take patience. It is not like a hundred yard dash
- soon to be over.

We must look away from something to something. To Christ. The life begins with faith.

Larry Russell - Quarterback, Wake Forest -

Terminious Success Running yesterday against V.P.I. 28-9

Sat. Week ago Russell's girl friend was killed in Auto Accident on

Way home from Charlottesville where he had his team over Va.

Whole philosophy on life is now more serious. — Told coach.
Funeral Martha Hill

"If you're going to do something
you'd better do it today.

Tomorrow might not ever come."