

The Amazing Grace Race
Hebrews 12:1-3

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Text Introduction: Tonight, our children's choirs are presenting a musical by this title, "The Amazing Grace Race." It is a wonderful musical with a wonderful message. I hope that you will return. This morning, I want us to take a look at this amazing and well known text, Hebrews 12:1-3.

Many consider the book of Hebrews to be one of the most complex books in the New Testament. Our unfamiliarity with the Old Testament sacrificial system is probably one of the issues that makes this a difficult book. In addition, the "warning" or "apostasy" passages also cause great concern for some. We can make the book much easier to understand if we understand the context of the original letter. The Book of Hebrews, written by an author unknown to us, was written to encourage Christians to persevere in their faith in the midst of persecution. Even though the recipients of the letter were victims of persecution, the call of the author is for them to persevere in their faith. Nothing, even persecution, should detract them from following Christ. Salvation through Christ is and was so superior to every aspect of their former way of life, that they would be fools not to persevere in their commitment to Christ.

The purpose of the book comes full circle in the last two chapters. The writer is calling them to "not shrink back from their faith," but rather plunge full steam ahead. We would do well to do the same. Our obstacles are not the same as that of the original recipients. We are not persecuted as they were persecuted. However, there are times when we ask the same questions that the Hebrews raised. Primarily, we raise this question: Is it really worth it to live for Christ? The answer from the book of Hebrews is an unequivocal "YES!"

Text: ¹ Therefore since we also have such a large cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us lay aside every weight and the sin that so easily ensnares us, and run with endurance the race that lies before us, ² keeping our eyes on Jesus, the source and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that lay before Him endured a cross and despised the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of God's throne.

³ For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, so that you won't grow weary and lose heart.

Introduction:

The best way to begin to attack this text for our understanding and application is to consider the final phrase first. Here it is: "So that you won't grow weary and lose heart." Some days are like that aren't they? In this world so filled with pain, misery, and difficulty, you might just want to say "Forget it." I'm done with the church. I'm done with Jesus. Too many problems. Too many heartaches. Too much bad news. Too many people complaining about stuff that really isn't important. The boss is not happy. The wife is not happy. And, I'm not happy. You are weary and are on the verge of losing heart.

Tom was weary. He had every reason to lose heart. Tom knew the meaning of having to persevere through the heart aches of life. Tom's father died when he was four years old. Because his mother could not afford to raise him, she took him to an orphanage. Eventually she "reclaimed" him. He graduated 44th out of his high school class of 44. He decided to join the Army because he heard that he could get a \$2,000 bonus just for signing up. Not until he filed the paper work did he realize that he signed up for the Marines instead of the Army. No bonus! After service he and his brother bought a small restaurant in their hometown for \$500. Not long after, he bought his brother out by giving his brother his Volkswagon. Not long after, the restaurant burned.

Maybe that is not exactly your story, but it sounds close. Maybe your reason for weariness and losing heart is more related to spiritual things.

Whatever your situation is today, this text is a call to perseverance. It is in every word of this text. The author provides us with a metaphor of running that is as applicable today as ever. The analogy comes from the popular sport of the first century—a running contest. If the New Testament were written today, I have no doubt that analogies from sport would be used. As Christians, in order to persevere, we better be trained and we better have a strategy. The strategy is given in our text today. I want you to observe with me the three strategies for running the race of life with Christ.

Find Encouragement as you run.

Where can we look for encouragement?

- Biblical Examples—This is the purpose of Hebrews 11. To encourage their faith, the writer has reminded them of all of these heroes of faith.
- Classical Examples—History is filled with great examples. I'm afraid to mention only one, but one of my favorites is the story of Polycarp. Polycarp was the overseer of the church in Smyrna in about 168 A.D. The government officials tried to get him to renounce his faith in Christ. Polycarp famously said, "Eight-six years I have served the Lord Jesus Christ, and He never once wronged me. How can I blaspheme my King who has saved me?"
- Modern Examples—Somebody like Billy Graham comes to mind.
- Personal Examples—What about those people whom the world will never know, but your faith has been strengthened by their example.

Here is one of the basic reasons that we ought not isolate ourselves as Christians. We need the constant encouragement to keep running strong.

Focus on the Essentials of the race.

- Run Cleanly—"Lay aside every weight." No doubt the imagery is stripping down to the bare minimum in order to run. Sometimes we even have to strip away good things so that we will be able to run well.

- Run Confidently—We must run with faith. “The sin” of this passage might be general, but some suggest that it could be the specific sin of unbelief.
- Run Consistently—“Run with endurance.” Our world has too many examples of those who did not finish well.

Follow the Example as you run.

- Fix our eyes on Jesus.

It is ok to glance at others for encouragement in this race, but only look to Jesus as the ultimate example.

- Fix our faith on Jesus.
We will finish by His grace. The message of the musical tonight is the message of this text. “In His Steps...In my shoes” is the tag line of the musical. That really is the message of this text. We have our race, but we must run in His steps.

What about Tom? He kept on persevering. Tom is Tom Monaghan. The little restaurant? He turned it into a restaurant that would specialize in one thing. He further decided that he would specialize not only in the product, but the delivery of that product. In 1998, Tom sold his little Pizza business called Domino’s for 1 billion dollars.