

How to Run with Endurance

a sermon in the series
Hebrews: An Epistle of Encouragement

A sermon delivered Sunday Morning, February 3, 2002
at Oak Grove Baptist Church, Paducah, Ky.
by S. Michael Durham
© 2002 Real Truth Matters

Hebrews 11:38-12:3

Of whom the world was not worthy:) they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth. 39 And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise: 40 God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect. 12:1 Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, 2 Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God. 3 For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds.

The many that have gone before us are not separated from us except in body only. There is a union that joins every saint from righteous Abel to the last of the elect who is to be gathered within the ark of Christ. My dispensational friends, who believe that the Old Testament saints were of an inferior order than we New Testament saints, are sadly mistaken. The Bible is rather clear that they and we are equally saved by grace through faith. There is no other justification by God than the kind that comes through faith in Christ. Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight" (Romans 3:20). We are brothers and joint-heirs with the saints of the Old Testament, and together we are the bride of the Lord.

Verse thirty-nine of our text reads,

And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise.

They like us receive God's unmerited favor by faith alone. But someone may object that the text says they "received not the promise," because "God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect." Would this not mean they were spiritually inferior to us?

Read this chapter again and honestly tell me you believe they are inferior to us. I cannot do it! Who among us have crossed a parted sea or put to flight the armies of the aliens? Who here today can testify that they have shut the mouths of lions or raised dead sons? Is there a man or

woman among us who can say they have been tortured or imprisoned for their faith? Have you been made to wander like a nomad, destitute and afflicted, because you are a believer? Then tell me how may we call these heroes of faith spiritually inferior? To do so is to be self-deceived and think much too highly of one's self.

What then have we received that is better, and why did they not receive the promise? This may be easier to explain than first thought. First, the Bible maintains all are saved by faith. This includes the Old Testament redeemed as well. Their faith was in God's promise of a redeemer who would reckon with their unrighteousness and make them righteous before God. In short, they looked forward. We, on the other hand, believe in the Messiah who has already come. He has already come, and we have seen through the testimony of Scripture the fulfillment of the promise. Jesus said of the saints of the Old Testament, "Many prophets and righteous men have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them, and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them" (Matthew 13:17). Thus, to "be made perfect" is here the equivalent of receiving the full accomplishment of the promise, or enjoying the complete realization of the "better thing." They did not see the promise fulfilled. We can look back and see it.

But second, perfection has not come to any of us yet. The final resurrection has not yet happened. We all long for the final redemption of these bodies. The writer of Hebrews is telling us that God has chosen to perfect us all, that is Old and New Testament saints, together at the same time.

Chapter twelve and verse one tells us that these saints who have gone before us are like a large crowd of witnesses that are encouraging us to persevere. Some have used this text to teach that the saints in heaven are able to look over the banisters of heaven upon us as if they were spectators at some sporting event. But that is not its meaning. Seven other times a form of this word "witnesses" is used in Hebrews. Each time it refers to the testimony of someone. In other words Paul is saying we have these who have gone on before us as a testimony that if they could endure by faith, then so could we. He then encourages us to behold this large group of testimonies of endurance and to keep running the race before us.

The Christian life is an endurance test. Erroneously, many think of being a Christian and narrow it down to a moment in time when someone is converted or saved. But that's like thinking of life only in terms of birth. Certainly there is much more to life than the act of being born. Many claim to have been born into the family of God but do not persevere in the Christian race. It is for this reason that the writer of Hebrews sat down and wrote this letter. He was encouraging a church or churches that were struggling in their endurance. He warns them in chapter two about neglecting "so great a salvation." In chapters three and four he warns of the perils of unbelief, using Israel as an illustration of beginning the race but not finishing it. In chapter five he chastises them for needing the elementary doctrines again instead of being teachers of the same to others. Chapter six strikes a blow against starting with Christ but not finishing with Him. Therefore, we can say that one of the central truths of the book of Hebrews is that the Christian life is a marathon. An example of this is found in chapter ten.

Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompense of reward. For ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise. (Hebrews 10:35-36)

There are no rewards for those who start a race but only for those who finish. In John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*, the dreamer tells us that he saw Pilgrim, later to be named Christian, come to a hill called "Difficulty." Two men accompanied him. One was named Hypocrisy and the other went by the name Formalist.

In addition to a spring, which was at the bottom of the hill, there were also two paths that branched out from the Straight Way, one to the left and the other turned to the right. Christian paid little attention to the paths that led off from the way, but scanning the narrow path which lay before him, he saw that it went straight up the hill. He perceived that a steep and exhausting ascent awaited him. He stepped over to the spring and refreshed himself with its cool water. As he cupped the water in his hands and raised them to his lips, he contemplated what lay before him.

There was no denying that this would be a arduous and painstaking climb, but the way to life runs straight up that hill and he had no choice but to follow it. He rose from beside the spring and began to climb the hill, saying,

*"The hill, though high, I covet to ascend;
The difficulty will not me offend;
For I perceive the way to life lies here:
Come, pluck up heart, let's neither faint nor fear,
Better, though difficult, the right way to go,
Than wrong, though easy, where the end is woe."*

The other two also came to the foot of the hill, but they were astonished that the path went straight up the hill and not around it. Turning to one another, thinking to themselves, "Why exhaust ourselves with such a difficult climb when it would be so much easier to simply go around it?" They saw that the two other paths branched off and appeared to go around the hill and rejoin the straight path on the other side. They considered their options and chose the paths of least resistance. "Therefore," says Bunyan, "they were resolved to go in those ways." They split up; one went on the path that "led him into a great wood;" and the other took the way "which led him into a wide field, full of dark mountains, where he stumbled and fell, and rose no more."

Listen to me beloved, "Woe to them that are at ease in Zion" (Amos 6:1): to be "at ease" is the very opposite of "running the race." That is what the book of Hebrews is all about. It tells us "don't get comfortable." Now if you are really saved today, you know comfort is hard to find while trying to persevere in the fight of faith. Much tribulation to be experienced in this world, and we are beset on all sides with trials, tribulations, and hindrances that would block our way to that glorious city. What we need to do this morning is to discover what the author of Hebrews states in our text as motives and enticements for us to keep running the race.

God has given us some enticements, some motivations, and some encouragement on how you and I can keep running the race. I want to speak of four this morning. First, in the twelfth chapter verse one we are instructed to listen to testimonies of faith. By listening to others who have gone before you, you too can be encouraged to keep on running the Christian life. Second, the text tells us to let go of unnecessary weight. Too many of us are trying to take too much to Heaven with us. Third, turn away from unconfessed sins. And fourth, we are to imitate Christ's example of completing the race.

LISTENING TO TESTIMONIES OF FAITH

Let's look at our first heading today, listening to the testimonies of faith. In verse one the text says,

Wherefore, seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses.

Do you know you need to be reading the Old Testament? So many of us have decided that we don't need the Old Testament, that it is not relevant to us, and so we decide to stay with the New Testament. Oh, dear friends, you cheat yourself out of encouragement to keep running and enduring for Christ. I want you to know that God wrote sixty-six books, not just twenty-seven. The books that we call the Old Testament are there for our encouragement. In fact, the purpose of the stories of the Old Testament is for our example. Speaking of the Old Testament people, listen to what Paul said in First Corinthians chapter ten and verse eleven. "Now all these things happened unto them for examples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come." Paul is saying God put the books of the Old Testament together as an example for us. Those in the Old Testament are examples in two ways.

First, they are a warning for those who will not finish the race, such as stories in the Old Testament about men like Saul. Saul appeared to have begun the race well. He seemed to be a champion for God, but he finished poorly, in fact, he didn't finish the race. All through the Old Testament there are instances where men appear to start the race, such as the children of Israel leaving under the leadership of Moses. But, the Bible says, because of unbelief they perished in the wilderness. Friends, there is an example for us in these Old Testament characters to warn us about people who start but don't finish.

But, second, the Old Testament is an encouragement on how to finish the race. You can't read the stories of people like David, Daniel, Joseph, and Samuel and not see that God can and will sustain His people. Although you may be going through difficulties that seem hard and burdensome to bear up under, you have example after example in the Old Testament of men and women who endured affliction. God will always sustain you. One of the most encouraging stories I find in the Old Testament is the story of Elijah, who was sustained physically by ravens which God sent to him. That was written for your encouragement. Its encouragement is that no matter how difficult it is God has promised to provide. And if they, saints who did not receive the promise can endure, so can you.

There is power in testimonies. That is what the Old Testament is, testimonies. But not only is there power in the testimonies of the Old Testament and New Testament saints, but some of the most significant testimonies today can come from brothers and sisters right here. God is using testimonies around here to help us to run the race. I have seen the benefit of this for years, and I am seeing it now lived out practically here in our church. Wednesday night is a wonderful time as people begin to share what God is doing in their lives and scarcely do I not hear on a Wednesday night someone leaving and saying “I needed to hear what God is doing in his or her life. It encouraged me.” Often we read about Moses, David, Daniel, Peter, James and John and we think God does those kinds of things for those kinds of people. We think we are not like that; they are a caliber above us spiritually and intellectually. But when you hear of God working in the lives of believers sitting beside you or in the pew ahead of you, you find hope. You look at their lives and see that they are not much different from you and your heart can be encouraged. Now let me tell you something, dear saint, we need to hear what God is doing in your life. You may say, “Pastor, I am afraid of public speaking. I fear it greatly.” Let me tell you something you ought to fear even more than public speaking, the fear that a brother or sister leaves here feeling discouraged because you were silent. If you are a believer, God is working in your life. Don’t minimize what He is doing, although you think it may seem unimportant to others. But if He is doing it, then it can’t be unimportant.

LET GO OF UNNECESSARY WEIGHT

Let’s move to my second heading, let go of unnecessary weight. The author of Hebrews says,

Let us lay aside every weight.

The word “weight” means encumbrance, something that would entangle you. I don’t believe he is mentioning things that are evil or unrighteous. He does that in the next phrase. No, this is something that you are holding onto that is not bad, but it doesn’t help you run the race. In fact, it slows you down. I think way too many Christians are packing way too heavily. We need to pack lightly. You don’t need to take the whole closet. When you book a flight on an airplane you will get your itinerary, and on the itinerary it will tell you your luggage capacity, that which you are allowed to take. Two luggage bags, no more than seventy pounds each, and a carry-on. Now why does the airline restrict how much luggage you can take with you? Because they understand that airplanes have a cargo capacity and if the weight exceeded a certain point the plane would never fly. Last year a popular musician and her band were killed in an airplane crash because the pilot failed to pay attention to extra weight and cargo. The plane crashed on take-off. Dear friend, there are things in my life and your life that are not necessarily bad, but they are weighting us down and hindering our ability to run the race stronger and swifter. It might be time on the computer or it might be television. It might be novels or magazines, it may be your job, it may be a person or a relationship, but there are things in your life that could be weighting you down. It might be sports or some recreational activity that you devote your time to. We are to “redeem the time because the days are evil.” Therefore, lay aside these things that are not necessary. May God, the Holy Spirit, show you right now what they are, things that are not bad, but they are certainly not helping you to run for Christ.

REPENT OF UNCONFESSED SIN

let us lay aside the sin that doth so easily beset us.

He does not say “let us lay aside sins which doth so easily beset us.” The word “sin” is in the singular. In my understanding, the writer of Hebrews is saying that there is a sin, a particular sin, which you are more susceptible to than any other. There is a weakness in your flesh unlike other weaknesses. It is the area you are more vulnerable to attack. What that might be will be different for each one of us. But again I ask you to look to the Holy Spirit and ask Him to show you what that single besetting sin might be. “What is it, Lord, that is in my heart that can so easily cause me to disobey?” Oh, dear friend, I want to encourage you today that God’s grace is sufficient even for that sin. God can, like a laser beam, take every stronghold of the enemy and He can eradicate it. He can burn it out and remove it from you in an instant of time, if you will humble yourself before God. Don’t play with sin; it will hinder you from running the race.

IMITATE CHRIST’S EXAMPLE

But the most important encouragement the writer gives us is the fourth and final one and that is to imitate Christ’s example. Look at verse two.

Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith.

Look at Him, study Him, and meditate on Him. You want to run the race more effectively? Look to Jesus. If you would say to me today, “Pastor, I am not running as swiftly or as strongly as I could, what is the answer?” The answer is simple, look to Jesus who is the author and finisher of your faith. This is an important statement that must not be overlooked, you are not the author of your faith. God doesn’t say, “Create faith and believe upon Me.” He wants you to exercise the faith that He gives you, for unto every man God has given a measure of faith (Romans 12:3). God is the one who grants faith to the sinner so that even the faith the sinner exercises that leads to justification is a gift granted to him. Salvation is wholly from the Lord. For the sinner to believe is an impossibility and a contradiction to his very nature. The faith to believe in Christ was purchased for the sinner by Christ. He is the author of our faith.

But He is also the sustainer of our faith. It was said of him by the prophet, “A bruised reed shall he not break, and the smoking flax shall he not quench (Isaiah 42:3). What little faith we may have He will not suffer it to be extinguished. He will nurture and cultivate it. Oh, how at times we seem so faithless but the ember of faith will not die. The sustainer of our faith will fan our weak faith’s spark and will increase it. “Lord, increase our faith.” And that is what He will do; He will increase our faith by taking it through the fires of testing. The very thing that seems to be killing our faith is reviving it and strengthening it. The Great Author of our faith is developing His creation of faith. “My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience” (James 1:2-3).

He, Christ Himself, was tested and His faith was challenged. The writer continues in verse two to focus our attention on our enduring Lord. He says,

Who for the joy was that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds.

Have you ever been to that point, where you thought you just could not go one step farther spiritually speaking? You had prayed for God to change the circumstance but it got worse. The marriage doesn't resolve, the finances get worse, the body decays, the children rebel. You come to a point of exasperation and think you can't go on. Wearied and faint, what do you do? You look to Jesus. You look particularly at the things He suffered.

I want to lay out here for us what the beloved author says. First of all, he shows us that Jesus endured the hostility of sinners. Now the text says, "consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners." The word "contradiction" means hostility. So what he is saying is, "consider Christ who received by the hands of men hostile treatment." Do you realize this morning, and please think with me if you need encouragement, that you need to stop and think about the hostile treatment men gave unto our Lord. Isaiah fifty-three says He was "despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not" (Isaiah 53:3). Isaiah goes on to say he was "oppressed, and he was afflicted and yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he opened not his mouth" (Isaiah 53:7).

It is amazing to me to consider what Jesus endured by the hands of sinners, by people just like us. Here the precious Gift of God was given to the world. God placed within the reach of man a Savior, a Hope in hopeless times. He granted unto men the very ability to look into the face of a man and see God. He was man's reconciliation to God. Man took God's gift and bitterly, harshly, and evilly abused it. Not only did man kill Jesus, but also look at their vengeance and their hatred. They made sure He suffered the most torments and harshest of tortures before they killed Him. Why does Pilate have His body stripped and a cat-of-nine tails taken to Him? Why such abuse that with each lash of the whip tears away skin, muscle and nerves from His living body? To add insult to injury, every time there was a lash of the cat-of-nine tails there was the jeering and laughing of the soldiers as they did it. This is the God of all creation, the very God who at that moment was sustaining them and holding them up by the power of His word, and yet by their hands He received cruel treatment. We would not think nor dare to take some evil dignitary from an enemy country and treat him so harshly, yet man takes the Dignitary of Heaven and makes Him suffer. He received the hostility of sinners and yet he endured by faith.

What have you endured today? Have you received the hostility of sinners? Have they taken their anger of God out on you? Upon Christ they did and He endured. Look to Him.

Secondly, the writer of Hebrews shows us that Jesus endured the mockery of sinners. “Despising the shame,”—they mocked our Lord and placed upon Him the greatest shame a human being has ever endured. Nobody has ever endured the public shame in mockery that our Lord has endured. We fear the least bit of shame, don’t we? We are scared of somebody thinking badly about us. Men can be so fearful of shame that they will choose death rather than shame. Men have literally committed suicide in order to try to keep from experiencing the public ridicule and shame of their actions. We hate it and we fear it so. These Hebrew Christians had experienced scorn and shame, and some were wobbling in their dedication to Christ. They had been in prisons, some of them had lost their properties, and they were beginning to think that they could not endure much more of this. Now before you judge them too harshly, be warned that you will judge yourself. I don’t know of anyone in this building today who has lost their home because they were a faithful Christian. Have you endured as they? Have you grown silent in your witness for the Master because you fear the shame and embarrassment that would result if you were just a little bit bolder for Christ? Think with me, friend, how many opportunities have been afforded you even last week to speak for Christ and you kept silent because you were embarrassed or feared shame? Oh, but Jesus endured the shame for us.

Think how despicable it must have been for God to receive shame. Follow my logic, what shame was it for God to become a man? That very act of humiliation in becoming a man had to be a very difficult thing. No one has ever demoted himself to the degree that Christ did to become a man. But not just a man, Isaiah said “a man of sorrows.” If the President of the United States were to grace our auditorium this morning we would rise in respect and afford him the greatest cordiality we have ever given a human being. We would consider it a treasonous act if the president would walk into a church somewhere and they begin to boo and heckle him. How shameful if they would throw something at him, spit on him, or curse him. Yet our Lord God came to this earth, and not only did he become a man. but He also was subject to the worst of insults and injuries.

If you look at a vagabond, a shiftless man who has no home, who is also a criminal, and we did those things to him, we would not think much about it. We might even say he had it coming. But to a king, to a president, to a dignitary, absolutely not; and yet that is exactly what happened to our Lord. He received shame and was falsely indicted as a blasphemer. God Himself was accused of being a blasphemer! Here we dare to look at Deity, perfection, and sinlessness and accuse this One of the greatest of crimes, blaspheming God. What an insult to a holy soul that surely would cause great grief and pain.

They insulted His position. They mocked Him as being a king. He wasn’t pretending to be a king. He was a king; and they mocked Him. They took a soldier’s scarlet robe and placed it upon His beaten back and put a reed in His hand and a crown of thorns to dishonor His brow. They falsely bowed before Him and pretended to worship. They mocked His position. They mocked His power; even while on the cross they would not let Him alone. What vileness. While He was on the cross the rulers derided Him, saying, “He saved others, let him save himself if he is the Son of God.”

Look into His face and you will see exactly what John said they saw, “And we beheld him as the glory of the only begotten of the Father full of grace and truth.” How could it be that men could look at Him and watch Him receive all the ridicule, hatred and the curses and yet He returns their reproachful looks with glances of love, and not know that God was before them?

The word “despised” means He considered it little. He considered that kind of ridicule very little. They mocked even His praying while He was on the cross. In His hour of great agony He cries “Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? that is to say, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” And they mocked Him further, “Let be, let us see whether Elias will come to save him.” How many men are brought to the execution and are allowed a final prayer? Yet our Lord in His execution for us was not even afforded such a dignity.

It is not as you have seen it painted on canvas. They stripped our Lord of His garment, the only thing that He owned in this world, and before the whole world He hung naked, bearing our shame. Was it not man who had sinned in the garden? Yet it was God who came down and covered the guilty and his nakedness. But on Golgotha’s hill guilty man disrobes God and places Him on a cross that all might see His nakedness. Do you think you have been embarrassed? You think you have been shamed? Look at Jesus, the author and finisher of your faith, and keep running.

Next, the writer of Hebrews shows us that Jesus not only received hostility and mockery, but He also endured the suffering of sinners on the cross. He endured the cross, the cruelest of all deaths, reserved only for the slave and the vilest of criminals. They took Him and threw Him down upon His beaten back. What could be left of His back after such a beating? Perhaps the rib cage and probably the spinal column. Irons stakes were driven through holy flesh. Riveted to a cross He hung. They dropped the cross into the earth with a sickening thud and His every joint was dislocated. The torture was still not enough for the Son of God; He must endure more. Nature joins in with the heat of the sun beating down upon His bloody brow. His fever rises; dehydration sets in and as the psalmists prophesied His tongue cleaved to the roof of his mouth like a piece of dry broken pottery. Added to the insult was being placed between two thieves and murderers, making the statement that He was the worst of the three.

Wouldn’t you think this was enough to suffer for our sins? Would you say that this is enough? Perhaps you would say to me, “I understand the lesson, tell me no more. I get the picture; we are to keep going on no matter the adversity.” But you must know the worst suffering that our Lord endured has not yet been described. There was a spiritual suffering that outweighed the physical. His soul was literally dying on that cross; not the end of existence but receiving the second death which is total separation from God. Never had a soul died on earth; Hell is made for the dying of human souls, but the soul of Christ died. It received death and the penalty of death. Within His soul Hell raged its fury. Jesus did not descend into Hell, but Hell descended into the lower parts of his heart and there it fought, knowing that it was fighting its last battle. Hell gave up everything to capture and destroy the very Redeemer that we are trusting in. Hell fought its best fight in the heart and soul of God that day. This was the conflict of the ages, and all the fury and rage of God’s judgment was poured out on our Lord.

To make matters worse, our Lord's shield and buckler was gone. Our Lord's high tower of refuge was gone. His pavilion of peace and safety was removed, for God the Father, His eternal companion, literally rejected Him and turned from Him. For thirty-three years Jesus had walked by the power of His Father and in constant fellowship with Him. At the pinnacle of our Lord's torment the unimaginable occurred, God turned on God. At that moment as Christ hung on the cross He received all of the Father's hatred and anger against our sin. His beloved Father and friend had now forsaken Him to the very torments of Hell and would not dare rescue Him or intervene. In fact the Bible says it pleased the Father to bruise Him. Yet He is innocent. He has not sinned. He has not blasphemed. He has not preached heresy. He is not done one thing but fulfill all of the law and righteousness. And holy God turns His back on His Son.

He not only received the torture of His generation but also every generation. And when the Father aimed the arrows of His righteous anger towards sin at Jesus' heart, He dipped every one in our sins. "He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was laid upon him and by his stripes we are healed" (Isaiah 53:5). Don't read the story and think it was Pilate only sending Christ to His death. It is you. It is me. I not only hear a crowd that day crying "Crucify Him, crucify Him," I hear my own voice, and it's the loudest. It was my sins that placed Him upon that cross and for me He willingly endured. I see me smiting His back and throwing his body upon the rails of the cross and taking iron and driving it into His arms and feet. But something much more severe than iron nails was used; I nailed my sins to Him. My sins nailed Him to the cross; my iniquities pierced His hands and my wicked deeds His feet. I, who He has always loved, stabbed His side, and I broke His heart.

There are so many torments that our Lord received, infinite torments, that we cannot deal with them all, but I want to add one more thought that perhaps you have never considered. Could the cross have been any more difficult for our Lord than what we have heard so far today? Perhaps if we think that the people He loved and was dying for were the very ones that rejected Him. He looked upon all whom His sufferings would save and He saw that it was our hands raised against Him that struck death's blow. Let the enemy be a stranger, but not one of your own family, and yet it was my sin that raised its hand against God and slew Him.

Jesus endured all of these things as an example. It says He endured them for the joy that was set before Him. There is a reason why I am asking you to endure and encouraging you to endure to run the race—there is a joy that is set before us. Even Jesus had a joy that He could look for beyond the agony and torment and say, "I see the cost, but I see the prize, and it is worth it." I want to illustrate it as I begin to conclude. Let us say that your father had an enemy. The enemy was now your enemy. As you passed him by on the street, he would always revile you, curse you, and try to do you some type of injury. You don't understand why, your father never really understood why. But one day in your travels you walk by his house and you notice a crowd gathered around his house and smoke billowing from the roof and windows of the house. The house is engulfed in flames. There you look up and there is his bedroom window and there is your enemy. You ask the folks around why they don't rush in and help him; they say it is too late the house is too far gone. He can't be saved. As he looks out the window crying for help he spies you, and once again he

begins to curse you. Not even fear of death diminishes his hatred for you, but all of sudden your heart is full of compassion and you throw off your coat and you rush the burning inferno. Maneuvering through the smoke you find your enemy's bedroom and you break through the door. However instead of rejoicing in your compassion and heroism he continues to revile you. He said he would rather die than be saved by you. You grab him to take him out of the burning house, and he begins to wrestle with you. He tries to throw you into the very flames that threaten his life. But you overcome him and carry his collapsed body through the flames out into the safety of the fresh air on the front lawn.

Would you try to save such a man? I don't know many men who would endanger their lives for such a terrible enemy. Flesh and blood probably could not do this, but God did. It was His joy rescuing us. He took an enemy and made a friend. Our text says that there was a joy that was set before Him. In other words, He saw the joy in the redemption of His enemies and said all the pain was worth it.

No matter the tribulation, the trial, the persecution, no matter the suffering, we are to endure because there is joy set before us. There is the joy of glorifying the Father through the Son. There is a joy in being with Christ and being elevated to His glory and reward. All of this is an encouragement we can receive if we consider the testimony of Jesus Christ. Having the saints' testimonies in the eleventh chapter, we have encouragement. I thank God for your testimonies that you give that encourage my heart and I thank God for the testimonies we find in Scripture, but there is one that outweighs all other testimonies. It is the testimony of Christ and what He endured by the hands of sinners for us.

So I want to encourage you today. Shouldn't you and I also run out to our enemies and tell them about this same salvation that we have experienced? Shouldn't that be our example also? Shouldn't we willingly say, "Lord, if you endured this for us, what man might do to us is little comparatively." Oh, the joy of knowing that others will be saved with us around our Father's table. That is what fuels my heart today. A love for God and a desire that people will know the same joy I have in Jesus Christ. If Jesus has borne such pain and agony for us will He not also bear us up at all times? You are not running in this thing alone. Your heart may be heavy today and you are miserable at this very moment. What is the answer? Again I bid you to our text, look "unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith." Amen.