

## Hebrews 12A (2014)

- The writer has concluded his tour through the Hall of Faith
  - We've examined the lives of many Old Testament saints, learning from their examples of what faith lived-out looks like
    - The writer began this tour following his fourth warning to the church
    - That warning explained the consequences of shrinking back
  - Specifically, he was concerned about Christians who step back from living with eyes for eternity in a vain attempt to preserve something about their earthly lives
    - In his day, the Church suffered great persecution
    - So the temptation was likely to return to Judaism, which was a relatively safe practice in the Roman Empire
    - But in doing so, they were repudiating the Lord Who bought them
    - They were sacrificing eternal, Heavenly reward for the sake of a passing, earthly gain
- So to inspire his audience to live-out their witness, even in the face of trials and persecutions, the writer presented example after example of OT saints who willingly accepted trials and deprivation and persecution for the opportunity to please the Lord
  - He ended with a conclusion that summed up his entire argument

**Heb. 11:39 And all these, having gained approval through their faith, did not receive what was promised,**  
**Heb. 11:40 because God had provided something better for us, so that apart from us they would not be made perfect.**

- The writer says all these saints gained God's approval by living-out their faith
- And they lived in this way, despite never seeing the full measure of their reward on earth

- For it was not God's intention to reward His people in this fallen, passing world
- That is our inspiration to do the same
  - Notice in v.40, the writer turns to his audience and adds that God had another reason in delaying their rewards
  - He says that God had something better for us
- God's plan is to provide the inheritance to the saints all at once
  - All saints throughout history will enter in the glory of the Kingdom together
  - And together, we will all receive our respective share of Christ's inheritance
  - How glorious it will be to see all the saints marching in together into the Kingdom, as the song celebrates
- So God's delay in rewarding the saints is part of a plan, one intended to bring all God's children together on an appointed day
  - Therefore, all His children are called to testify through a life of patient, expectant faith
    - We await our rewards in Heaven
    - We don't grow faint or weary in the meantime
    - This is where the writer picks up as he moves into Chapter 12, with his exhortation

**Heb. 12:1** Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us,

**Heb. 12:2** fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

- Referring back to Chapter 11, the writer says first, since we have such a great legacy of examples, we should look to these examples
  - He calls them a cloud of witnesses, which is a phrase that reminds us they still exist in spirit form only

- These witnesses have not yet received their new physical bodies
- Like us, they await the resurrection
- Once again, the writer is emphasizing that apart from us, these saints will not see the fulfillment of God's promises
- Furthermore, the word "witnesses" doesn't refer to an observer, but rather to one with a testimony
  - In other words, the writer isn't saying these saints are watching us – they're not
  - He means we should be watching them, as in taking note of their examples
  - And if we're taking note of them, then we should do as they did
- Secondly, the writer instructs us to lay aside every encumbrance and sin so that we may run the race set before us
  - There are several important elements to this exhortation, beginning with the notion of laying aside sin
    - The Greek word translated "encumbrance" is used only here in the New Testament
    - It's a word commonly used in relationship to running a race
    - We might use the word "drag" or "resistance"
    - Anything that negatively impacts a runner's ability to gain full speed
  - Obviously, in a foot race, we want to eliminate anything that holds us back and slows us down
    - When you race, you are trying to win the race to obtain the prize
    - You can't achieve that goal as long as you run encumbered by resistance or drag
    - Swimmers wear skull caps, or even shave their bodies of all hair, to reduce drag
    - It's that important to ensuring they can win the race...they want every advantage they can get

- Likewise, we want every advantage we can get, for our race is far more important
  - We are running a race against ourselves
    - As Paul writes in Romans 7, when he talks about the duality of the saved man living in an old body, shackled by sin
    - We are running to win an eternal prize
    - Not our salvation, for that a free gift of God, obtained by faith alone
  - We are running, so to speak, to please the Master Who bought us so that we might please Him and receive a greater share of His inheritance
    - Remember Paul's own words on how he understood his race

**1 Cor. 9:25** Everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things. They then do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable.

**1 Cor. 9:26** Therefore I run in such a way, as not without aim; I box in such a way, as not beating the air;

**1 Cor. 9:27** but I discipline my body and make it my slave, so that, after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified.

- Notice Paul echoes the writer's line of thought
- He says that he must exercise self-control in the race of life to ensure a good outcome
- So that even after he has helped others live a life that pleases the Lord, he himself must not be disqualified from winning his own prize
- That prize being a great imperishable reward
- So if we want to follow the lead of the OT saints like Abraham, Moses, and the prophets, we must begin by setting aside the sin that is holding us back from obedience
  - Those sins are numerous for all of us
    - Search your heart, and you will know what you must do
    - Lay aside the sin, put it away, walk away from it
    - Don't play around the edges of the problem

- And in doing so, you are freeing yourself from a drag-weight that is literally preventing you from winning your race
- If you do so, you can expect that the prize that lies ahead of you will far surpass the temporary pleasures of what you can provide yourself today
  - We must all recognize that though we have been saved from the penalty of sin by the grace of God , we are still called to wrestle with it
  - And as we struggle and persevere, we are not furthering our salvation, for the Lord won that battle on our behalf
  - Rather, we are ensuring that we will not be disqualified from receiving our prize
- Finally, notice how the writer describes the race of our life of faith: it is a race “set before us”
  - The Lord, in His sovereign will, has prepared a race for each of us
    - Put simply, the Lord has designed us to experience a certain life
    - Some of us will have strong health, some of us will not
    - Some of us will have great wealth, some of us will have little
    - Some of us will know joyful family life, some of us will experience great tragedy
    - Some of us will live peaceful lives of faith, while others will be persecuted and martyred
  - The Lord has set these races before us
    - We didn’t choose them; He did
    - He didn’t ask us to approve of His choices
    - But He does ask us to run well the race He set before us
  - Run with endurance, the writer says
    - “Endurance” implies difficulty – don’t give up
    - Like a runner rounding the final bend and staring at the finish line in the distance, don’t stop running until you reach the tape

- What a shame it would be to run a good race of faith, sacrificing for the Lord and husbanding your witness...only to give up in the final lap
- To succumb to sin and to indulge our fears and weaknesses
- We all have struggles in our walk of faith
  - In fact, the Lord has ensured that all of us face tests in our walk of faith
    - These tests are God's way of qualifying us for the reward
    - You can't win if you don't run, so to speak, which is why James opens his letter with such counterintuitive advice

[James 1:2](#) Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials,

[James 1:3](#) knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance.

[James 1:4](#) And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

- We are to consider trials in our life as joy
  - Because the existence of a trial is evidence the Lord is at work, offering us an opportunity to demonstrate endurance
  - Endurance to walk with trust in the Lord's promises
  - Endurance to make the sacrifices of time and treasure required to move the Kingdom forward
  - Endurance not to shrink back from the trials to seek comfort in the world
  - Comfort in materialism, ego, lust, drugs, career, whatever
  - And that endurance will bring a result of ensuring we lack none of the rewards the Lord offers to us for obedience
- And of course, as usual, our ultimate example is found in the work of Christ
  - In v.2, the writer says, fix your eyes on Jesus's example
    - He is the author and perfecter of our faith
    - The Greek word for "author" can also mean "pioneer" or "originator"

- Jesus authored our faith, in the sense that He went before us to establish a way into salvation
- Furthermore, as Paul says in Ephesians 2, He then brought saving faith to each of us as the starting point of our relationship with God

**Eph. 2:8** For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God;

**Eph. 2:9** not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.

- More than authoring our faith, Christ is also the perfecter of our faith
  - The Greek word for “perfecter” means “to carry through to completion”
  - Jesus doesn’t just start us down the road to salvation, He ensures we complete that journey
  - He brings us into a state of glory by His power, not by our own
- But between the beginning and the end, lies a course with many turns and detours
  - We have a part to play in mapping out that journey
  - Some choices pay greater rewards than others
  - The key to taking the right road is to have a clear view of the destination
- So the writer says, fix your eyes on Jesus and what He did in His earthly life’s journey
  - He had an immense trial set before Him by the Father
    - The course of obedience given to Christ was greater than anything we have faced
    - He was tempted to seek refuge in the world and to avoid the cross
    - Obedience required Jesus to set aside everything, including life and His power as God, so He could endure the cross
  - He was willing to endure these trials because of the great joy set before Him

- The joy of pleasing the Father
- The joy of receiving a great inheritance and a people called by faith
- He is our North Star, the target we set our sights on so that as we run our race, we have a reminder of how it should be run

**Heb. 12:3** For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

- Let's consider Jesus in this way, as One Who shows us how to live a life of faith in the face of trials
  - Jesus endured harsh treatment at the hands of sinners
  - Just as you will endure harsh treatment at the hands of sinners
  - And when you consider how He pressed forward anyway, you and I can find reason not to grow weary and lose heart
- You might say, "Well, Steve you don't know what I have endured"
  - You might have a testimony of great suffering and abuse
  - You may have endured a life of tragedy and tremendous loss
  - I'm sure many of us have endured many things in life that could become reason to shrink back and seek compensation in some kind of sinful pursuit
- But if we compare our trials to those Jesus faced, we come up short every time
  - As the writer says in v.4

**Heb. 12:4** You have not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood in your striving against sin;

**Heb. 12:5** and you have forgotten the exhortation which is addressed to you as sons, "MY SON, DO NOT REGARD LIGHTLY THE DISCIPLINE OF THE LORD, NOR FAINT WHEN YOU ARE REPROVED BY HIM;

**Heb. 12:6** FOR THOSE WHOM THE LORD LOVES HE DISCIPLINES, AND HE SCOURGES EVERY SON WHOM HE RECEIVES."

- In the trials you've endured, have you sacrificed your life for the sins of the world?

- Have you worked so hard to set aside sin and endure trials that it required you give your life?
- Obviously, the answer is no, which is why the writer poses this question rhetorically
- We can't say that our trials have been so hard that our encumbrance in sin is necessary and understandable
  - We still have more we can do to endure and run the race
  - In fact, Jesus says the servant is not greater than the Master
  - If the Father was willing to demand our Master die to please Him, is it too much to say that He might ask us to die to please Him?
  - And if our trials bring us to the end of ourselves, as it did Christ, then so be it
  - Our reward in Heaven will be great
- In fact, this church had sought to escape their trials by sinfully retreating to spiritual life as an unbelieving Jew, a life that testified that the Messiah had not yet come
  - This sin was their escape from trials, which the Lord delivered to perfect them through endurance
    - So to those who see trials as reason to indulge sinful options, the writer rebukes his audience, saying you have forgotten the whole reason God brings trials
    - Trials are sent as discipline measures by God
  - The writer quotes from Psalm 3
    - The psalmist says, don't regard lightly (or reject) the discipline of the Lord
    - We reject the Lord's discipline when we do not take advantage of the trials He sends us to grow and learn endurance
    - To use them to become a better witness of love and faith and joy in the Lord
    - To learn our weakness and crucify the flesh

- Imagine if you your father grounded you for a week as discipline for something you did wrong
  - And then imagine that instead of obeying that restriction, that you would sneak out of the house every night anyway
  - You would be rejecting the discipline of your father
  - And rather than feeling regret and learning a lesson that would pay dividends in the future, you would have missed the whole point of the discipline
  - And you would very likely repeat the same mistake in the future, possibly with even greater consequences the next time
- As the writer says

**Heb. 12:7** It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom his father does not discipline?

**Heb. 12:8** But if you are without discipline, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate children and not sons.

**Heb. 12:9** Furthermore, we had earthly fathers to discipline us, and we respected them; shall we not much rather be subject to the Father of spirits, and live?

**Heb. 12:10** For they disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but He disciplines us for our good, so that we may share His holiness.

**Heb. 12:11** All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness.

- When we confront a trial of any kind – whether emotional, marital, physical, financial, or whatever – we are encountering a course the Lord has set before us
  - It is a form of discipline the Lord is using to grow us spiritually
  - And we only gain that benefit if we endure it, accepting it as a loving act of a Father who is disciplining us for our own good
- The Lord works in a similar way with His children
  - Because He loves us, He doesn't want us to continue in sin and suffer the loss of rewards as a result
  - So He brings us discipline in the form of trials
  - These trials move us over time away from sin and our fleshly behaviors and into a closer spiritual walk with Him

- But they only have this effect if we accept them as discipline...as something good for us
- Perhaps we might say that it's unkind for the Lord to bring these things upon us
  - As the saying goes, what kind of loving God allows tragedies to befall His children?
    - The Bible says it is proof of His love that these things come, because they have good eternal outcomes
    - When we ask the Lord to give us an easy life, absent trials and disappointments and tragedy, here's what we're really asking Him to do
    - We're asking Him to not discipline us
    - To allow us to remain as fleshly and sinful as when He found us
    - We're asking Him to refrain from growing us spiritually so that we can please Him through our endurance and gain eternal reward
  - Would a loving Father accept those terms? If your child asked you to forgo discipline so he or she could grow up spoiled and immature, would you agree to that arrangement?
    - As the writer says, no loving father would make that bargain
    - So why do we think our loving Father in Heaven would do such a thing?
  - In fact, if the Father in Heaven neglected to bring us trials for the sake of discipline, it would mean we weren't His children at all
    - Can you discipline the child of another family, like a stranger's child in a supermarket?
    - No, because you have no relationship with that child
    - Likewise, if you could live a life free of God's discipline, it would only be possible if you didn't have a relationship with Him
      - That is, if you weren't saved by His grace
- So the writer says, if we accept the discipline of our earthly fathers with understanding, then we should be able to accept the discipline of our Heavenly Father with understanding

- We should welcome His discipline
  - The discipline of our earthly fathers taught lessons that lasted a lifetime
  - But God teaches us lessons that last an eternity
  - We are grown spiritually, so that we can carry that maturity into our next life
  - And that maturity will bring us a far greater, lasting reward
- That's why in v.11, the writer says all discipline, whether from our earthly father or our Heavenly father, is not something we value in the moment
  - Yet in the long run, with the benefit of hindsight, we come to appreciate why it was necessary and worthwhile
  - God's discipline produces righteousness
  - It brings a peaceful fruit that leaves us better prepared for the next trial
  - And in eternity, at our judgment before the Lord, we will see just how much we profited from our trials and the spiritual maturity they produced
- But of course, we only gain these benefits if we endure the trials
  - With each challenge we face in life, we are at a crossroad orchestrated by God Himself
    - It's the course He has set before us
    - Consider these great trials to be evidence that we have a lot of spiritual growing to do
    - And the Lord has counted us worthy to receive His attention in this way
    - And the question is, will we receive His discipline and learn the lesson and endure the trial and receive the reward?
    - Or will we reject His discipline, miss the lesson, shrink back from the trial, indulge our sin and forfeit eternal reward?
  - You have not endured to the point of shedding blood like Christ...so fix your eyes on His example and repeat it

- Run the race He set before you
- Do so with endurance, so that you will not be disqualified from the prize that awaits