

Get in the Race

Cadet Sunday. January 29, 2017

Hebrews 12:1-3

There are different ways to explain our life. Some people say life is like wind. One day it comes and soon goes away. There is nothing left behind. Others say life is like the sun in the sky. It rises in the morning with hope and brightness, but when the evening comes, there will be no more life but only darkness. I don't think those are good metaphors. I don't believe our life goes away just like wind or the sun. Here is another metaphor. How about saying, "Life is a journey."

When we are born, we begin our journey. We don't know where we will be 10 or 20 years later, but we are walking in our journey. When I was a teenager I was in Korea. I never thought I would be in the USA. Just four years ago, I didn't even know where Modesto was. See! We start out from one place and we may end up in a completely different place. We never know where our life will take us.

Life is a journey, but it is not only in our physical body, but also in our spirit. When we believe in Jesus, we are born again in our spirit. We begin our spiritual journey. Some people begin their spiritual journey when they are young; others may begin later.

Cadets, let me ask you some questions about your spiritual journey. The Bible says Jesus is the Christ and the Son of the living God. Jesus died for you and rose from the dead. Do you believe it? [Amen?] So what does it mean by believing in Jesus? One day Jesus said to Martha whose brother Lazarus was dead, "*I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?*" (John 11:25-26) Jesus was saying those who believe in him would have eternal life. Martha responded, "*Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who was to come into the world*" (John 11:27). Just as he asked Martha, Jesus is asking you this morning, "*Do you believe this?*" If you do, can you say it just as Martha said? As you believe in Jesus as your Savior and Lord, you have begun your spiritual journey. In this world we don't know where we will be in our body in 10 or 20 years, but in spirit, we know where we are going. We Christians have a journey to heaven. It is a long journey. And Jesus doesn't want us to be lost. So he gives us some directions that we can find in our text.

There are three "Let us" phrases we need to follow: "let us throw off..." "let us run..."

and “let us fix...” What does each “let us” mean?

First, “let us throw off (ἀποτίθεμαι)” means “to put away.” It says we need to throw off “everything”—this includes good or bad. What does that mean? Do we need to stop doing all things? No. Here Paul is using a metaphor of a race. Have you seen runners? Have you run a long distance? I am not a runner but several years ago I decided to run 6 miles. That was my first try. I tried to prepare myself for the race as much as I could. I got good running shoes; I had a fancy hair band and a hat; I had a watch; I had a small towel. And I had a bottle of water. I was so ready, but when I began to run... ohhh.. man.. it wasn't easy. Even before I reached a mile, I had to throw away the bottle. I threw away the towel. I even felt this hairband was too heavy. I had to throw away everything that weighed on me. This is what it means “throwing off everything that hinders us” (or weighs us down).

Another meaning of the word “throwing off” is “to stop doing what we are used to doing.” Let's say I threw away this towel because it weighed on me. But somehow it came back and entangled my legs. I wouldn't be able to run at all. This is what sin does to us. We may not want to sin, but sin may trip us up. For example, we may think a small lie is not a problem. A little cheating – who cares? But the problem is the more we sin the more we want to commit sin. If we keep hating someone in our mind, eventually we may want to harm that person. That is sin. It keeps growing. It keeps entangling us and we can't live our Christian life. We can't walk with God. The Scripture says, “Stop doing what you used to do” if that makes you turn away from God. Try to obey God's commands. Try to be holy so that you can be blessed by God in your journey.

Now let's go back to my race again. I threw away all things that weigh on me. – no more hat, no more towel, no more bottle. And my legs were cleared. No sin entangled me, but that didn't mean the race was easy. No, not at all. Even though I was free to run the race, the race was still so difficult. I thought I was dying. I wanted to give up. Then I thought of my family. My wife and two boys were waiting for me at the finish line. Even though I would finish last, I didn't want to disappoint them. So I pushed myself. “Come on Peter. You can do it. You can do it.” And I did it. I was late, but I didn't care. I was so joyful because I finished the race.

“Let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us” (v.1c). We need to keep on running with perseverance. Do you think you have done enough? Do you want to give

up? Hear what Paul says about our race, *“Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 3:13-14)*. We shall never give up because there will be more joy when we finish the race.

Jesus is our example. Dying on the cross was the most humiliating and painful punishment. Jesus, who had a human body just like you and me, had to suffer that pain. Because it was so painful, Jesus even cried out, *“Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me” (Luke 22:42a)*. However, he obeyed the Father. *“Yet not my will, but yours be done” (Luke 22:42b)*. He died on the cross to forgive our sins. So, what motivated Jesus? It was joy and glory he could see beyond the cross. Jesus knew that his people would be saved through his blood. He knew all nations would come to him and his name would be glorified. So he was able to take up the cross with joy. This is why we need to fix our eyes on Jesus. *“Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God” (v.2)*.

We fix our eyes on Jesus, not on our reputation nor on our knowledge or experience, but on Jesus who shows us the perfect example and who is praying for us and encouraging us at the right hand of God the Father. This is how we can finish the race before us.

Brothers and sisters, and Cadets, our journey is not always easy. There are things to make us all weary at times. It's because of the problems we have: personal problems, financial problems, health problems, relationship problems, school problems. All kinds of things may happen to make us weary in both body and soul. So we fix our eyes on Jesus who is the author and perfecter of our faith. We *“consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you [we] will not grow weary and lose heart” (v.3)*. Meditate on the word of Jesus. Think of what Jesus did on the cross. That will encourage us to continue to follow Jesus. You are not alone in this world. We are all in the race. When God brings us together to this family, we are committed to each other. We will race together. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus and run the race until we finish the race. Amen.