

PREPARING FOR THE FUTURE

Hebrews 12:1-3

Intro: When we talk about preparing for the future, we do not necessarily mean doing something different. It may mean that, but probably in most cases it means improving what we are already doing. If a person is a Christian, he will be one who is reading his Bible. Perhaps the reading has been done without much prayer or meditation or application. And so with the coming of the new year we plan to keep on reading the Bible, but paying closer attention to what we are reading, and seeking by God's grace to meditate on the truth for greater understanding and for more practical application of the truth to our own hearts and lives.

I think that was in the mind of the writer of the book of Hebrews when he wrote what we have in the first three verses of chapter 12. He had rebuked his readers in chapters 5 and 6 because they had not grown in the Lord as they should have grown for the length of time that they had been saved. But there had to be some signs of life in them or he would not have written to them as he did in those earlier chapters. In fact, if you read to the end of chapter 6 you will see that he commended them for their "work and labor of love" which they had showed toward each other in that they were ministering to each other, and were still ministering. But then we find these two verses in Heb. 6:11 and 12:

11 And we desire that every one of you do shew the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end:

12 That ye be not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises.

This seems to have been their problem. They had not been pursuing the promises of God "through faith and patience." As I have pointed out to you in previous messages, it is easy for us to be busy doing what we think we should do to serve the Lord, that we forget that the Christian life is really a life in which we need to concentrate upon what the Lord is doing in us and for us in fulfillment of His many promises.

This morning we considered the children of Israel as they were about to enter the land, and Moses told them to remember the ways of the Lord with them for the past forty years, thinking about what the Lord had done in them instead of paying so much attention to what they wanted the Lord to do for them, such as, on food and water and protection from their enemies. The Lord never minimizes what we do for Him. That is what the Apostle told them in chapter 6, verse 10, that God would have been

unrighteous to forget what they had been doing for His people. And God is never unrighteous about anything. But the Lord wanted to see them paying more attention to the promises He had given them, promises that are found all through God's Word, and then by faith seeking the fulfillment of those promises in their daily fellowship with the Lord. God's promises are important to Him, or He never would have given them to us. And He wants them to be important to us. The Christian life is a life of faith, not faith that God will do whatever we want Him to do, but faith in what He has promised in His Word that He will do for us.

To help us in this, we learn in this epistle about the high priestly ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who was "a priest after the order of Melchisedec" (or Melchizedek, as it is spelled in the OT). He represents us before God! He "ever liveth to make intercession for us" (Heb. 7:25). Even while the Lord was here on earth, He spoke to Peter about how Satan desired to sift Peter as wheat. And the Lord had given Satan that power. But then the Lord added,

32 But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren (Luke 22:32).

Here was the Lord acting in a high priestly manner, showing his concern for Peter's faith. We know how Peter failed the Lord, but we also know what a rock of strength he became in the ministry of the early church, and how he has served every generation of the Lord's people from his day until now, and on to the end of time, through his example and through his epistles.

But another thing the writer of Hebrews did to help us with our faith, or, to state it another way, to help us in trusting God, he has given us by the Holy Spirit the eleventh chapter of Hebrews which has become known as *the faith chapter of the Bible*.

Over and over again we have the people of God in OT times mentioned, names any Bible reader has become acquainted with, and we are told what they did "by faith," or, what they did trusting in the promises of God. They were in situations where all they had to go on was the Word of God, and by God's grace they believed His promises, and found God totally faithful to what He had said that He would do. So in each case "by faith" is not only linked to a person, but linked to a verb telling us what that person did! This was not only to commend them, but to encourage us when we come to that chapter. We all have to admit that one of our many problems is that we do not trust the Lord as we should.

So when we come to chapter 12 which is just a continuation of chapter 11, we see what the writer called all of those OT saints. It was that they were:

I. “A CLOUD OF WITNESSES” (Heb. 12:1).

That is a strange expression, isn't it? And I imagine that that is why many have felt that all of those OT saints were observing us from heaven, and that they are so numerous that they are like a great cloud. But I don't know that the Scriptures teach that the saints in heaven are able to watch what is going on on the earth. It would seem that, if they could, their joy would not be as complete as the Scriptures lead us to believe that it is.

I rather believe that, while the words here could picture a large amphitheater with the people of chapter 11 sitting in the stands, watching us in the arena, yet you and I know that most of the people who go to a game or an event of some kind like that, have never been in the arena themselves. The people in chapter 11 are not “grandstanders,” but they have been in the battle themselves – all of them. And they are “witnesses,” not because they are looking at us to see how we are going to do, but they are those whose lives testify to the faithfulness of God in response to His people who have trusted in His promises.

An OT principle that applies here is that “at the mouth of two witnesses, or at the mouth of three witnesses shall the matter be established” (Deut. 19:15b). Even our Lord Jesus Christ referred to this truth from the OT when He told the Pharisees, “It is also written in your law, that the testimony of two men is true” (John 8:17).

How many witnesses do we have here in Hebrews 11? At least 16, plus all of the people who crossed the Red Sea who are mentioned in verse 29, plus the prophets in verse 32. Then the Apostle indicated that there were others he could have mentioned. *The testimony is overwhelming!!!* No one can possibly dispute such evidence. Those who trust God are not dreamers; they are men and women who believe that God is faithful, and that He really meant, and continues to mean, what He has promised to do for His people as it is recorded in His Word.

Now notice:

II. THE APOSTLE'S APPEAL (Heb. 12:1-2).

A. To whom is it directed?

We find this in the words, “Let us.” And the construction of the original language gives these words to us twice. The people that are mentioned in chapter 11 were not super-saints. There are no super-saints. We may have different ministries in the work of the Lord, but we are all just sinners saved by grace. Some may be in situations where it is obvious that they are called upon to trust the Lord more than others, but the promises are for all of us. God has no favorites. He loves us all the same, and His promises are for all of us.

B. How do we prepare, and how do we keep in condition?

“Let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us.”

A series of sermons could be preached on those words. And they represent the hindrances to life of trusting the Lord. The Apostle was speaking here about the life of faith as a race. When men or women are running a race, they don't go out dress like football players. They wear only the least amount of clothes that they can. Anything excessive is what the Apostle meant by the word “weight.” These are things which are not necessary, but they clutter up our lives. It can be a hobby which is taking too much of our time. Some people are busy with so many things that they really don't have time to read their Bibles and pray as they should. We give ourselves projects. The weights are what we have to identify in our own lives. All of us have the same amount of time. We need to be careful that even recreation doesn't consume too much of our time. Don't give time to anything that makes it more difficult for you to get back to the things of the Lord. These are not sins, but they are weights.

But sin comes into the picture here as well. Besetting sins have been defined as sins which easily surround us, and overtake us. We all have our weak points, and we are weaker than we think we are. Robertson says that the idea in this word pictures a group around a campfire which is circled by wild animals ready to pounce on the first one who gets careless and wanders away from the fire. Read those passages in the epistles which speak of sins. Which one is your problem? Which one is mine? The Word will help us identify our weights and our sins. Psalm 66:18 tells us, “If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me.”

It may often be difficult to distinguish between a weight and a sin. In

fact, a weight can become a sin.

Athletes who are serious about their competition never stop training. And neither can we. We are not competing with each other, but we have a race to run, and a prize to win. Remember what the Apostle Paul had to say about himself. See Phil. 3:14, "I press toward the mark . . ." This has nothing to do with securing our salvation, but it has everything to do with pleasing the Lord and with growing in the knowledge of the Lord.

And then we read in verse 2:

C. "Looking unto Jesus" (Heb. 12:2).

It is not a case where we have done the other, and then look to Jesus, but we are "looking unto Jesus" from the very start because it is from Him, and Him alone, that we have our faith strengthened. The only way we can look unto Jesus is in the Word, and it is through constantly looking unto Him that we find the faith which enables us to trust the Lord and to lay claim to His promises.

And He is our great Example of One Who trusted God perfectly. "Jesus" means the incarnate Christ. And regardless of how severely we struggle against sin, we have never had to run the race like our Lord Jesus Christ ran it while He was here on earth.

What was the joy which was set before our Lord while He was here on earth? I think we can see that more clearly in the Gospel of John than we can anywhere else in Scripture. His joy was doing the Father's will. His joy was glorifying the Father. It was to finish His work. It was to please the Father in all things. If we are "looking unto Jesus," this is what we see in Him. Man by nature is not concerned at all about pleasing God. Our Lord was not concerned about anything else but pleasing Him. Even in Gethsemane this is what won out with the Lord. Let us never think that it was easy for the Lord to die. It was most terrible for Him. But that was the Father's will for Him, and His heart would not let Him do anything else. We look away to Jesus realizing that the faith we needed to enter the race came from Him, and the faith we need to continue unto the end, also comes from Him.

Finally, just a word about:

III. “THE RACE THAT IS SET BEFORE US” (Heb. 12:1b).

It is to be run “with patience,” that is, *with perseverance*. We are never to give up. We are to keep running, but with our eyes always on the Lord. And God is the One Who has laid out the course before us. Our objective is to please God, but the course before each one of us is laid out especially for each one of us.

Concl: The coming of a new year gives us an excellent opportunity to determine how we are running in this race which we are all running. The most important thing that God is doing in our day, or in any day, is the work that He is doing in the lives of His people. We all are in the race, and we have personal responsibilities in that race which are clearly mentioned in these verses we have been considering tonight. Let us recognize the great need we have to trust the Lord more than we have been trusting Him. Let us dwell on the lives of those who have gone before us, whose story is given to us in the Word of God. And then let us pray that we will run like they ran, believing God’s promises, and showing that we believe by the way we trust Him from day to day.