

Hebrews

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Hebrews 12:3-11



Vss. 3-4

- The preacher here uses two interesting words for “not grow weary” and “lose heart”. Aristotle was fond of these words and used them to describe the utter exhaustion a runner feels after making the final push for the finish line and then collapses after winning. The preacher is here then encouraging his people to keep running, keep pushing, until *AFTER* they have finished the course.
- He encourages his people in two ways. First, he reminds them that they have not yet entered into a life-or-death struggle for their faith. When he says that they have not yet resisted to “the point of shedding blood”, he uses the very phrase the Maccabean leaders used when calling on their troops to fight to the death. This was something the people of the congregation would not miss. This is why he reminded them of the great heroes in Ch. 11, for now they must be willing to show that same kind of faith and to learn to trust God for the results.
- Second, the preacher asks them to stop and compare their own sufferings in the cause of Christ against what Christ suffered for them. Christ gave up the glories of heaven to come to earth to be despised and rejected. “If He has done this for you”, the preacher is asking, “how can you not give your all for Him?”
- We are reminded of the cost of following Jesus that is required of each disciple. The Way of Christ led to the crucifixion of Christ. Can a way so costly ever be lightly considered?

Vss. 5-11

- The preacher anticipates the obvious question from the people: “If God truly loves us, then why doesn’t He protect us from sufferings?”. His answer is that we should not think of bad circumstances as mere suffering, but as an opportunity for growth, to take the discipline the Father gives us and see it as being from the deepest part of His love for us.
- The preacher makes the point that a loving father *always* disciplines his child. Now discipline comes in many forms. Giving a child a list of chores to do is good discipline.

Giving an adolescent child a curfew is good discipline. We too often think of discipline as corporal punishment only, but structure and testing teaches discipline better than any punishment. It is a poor parent that simply allows a child to do as they please. Even if you have a variety of kids over whom a father must instruct, he will hold his own child to a higher standard than those who are not his own.

- The people of the preacher's congregation understood the power of a father. In Roman culture, the father was an absolute ruler. There was never a time when the children came of age and could make their own decisions. Even if the first son should marry, the father has absolute authority over the new family, including his son's children and grandchildren. No matter if that son was a victorious general or a member of the Roman senate, he was still under his father's 100% authority.
- So then the preacher wants us to see that we are to understand life's hardships as God's discipline, given to us not for our harm or to bring us sadness, but for our good so that "we may share His holiness".
- God is not vindictive. Our sufferings are not due to God lashing back at us. Most every military recruit in bootcamp is sure that their sergeant hates them and is out to get them. No, the sergeant's job is to teach discipline. He knows that someday his recruits may have to be in combat and the discipline they learn from him is the best chance they have of surviving and winning the battle. God's discipline is the same way. Just as the recruit doesn't understand why washing out trashcans is crucial to being a soldier, so too do we not understand the value of the little struggles we have. But when the soldier realizes that all that the sergeant demands is for his wellbeing and when the disciple realizes that God's discipline is for our wellbeing and comes straight from the deepest part of His love for us, then we begin to view hardships and sufferings differently.
- We may look at God's discipline with self-pity, with resentment, or with anger when discipline comes, but when we realize the truth that there is no discipline from God that does not spring from His love for us and is not given for our greater growth as a disciple, then all the self-pity, resentment, and anger melts away.