The Book of Hebrews

Chapter 12

We have gone through the “giants of the Faith” section, and what the writer is doing with all this, is trying to instill in the believers, the idea, that all their heroes before them, walked in great faith, following the path God had placed for them most times through great peril and difficulty. For the most part we do not look back and think of the hardships our own ancestors faced as they strove to accomplish their tasks, or careers, or live life in general, in ancient times with rudimentary tools, and the hardships of adverse weather, the dangers from the wild and little in the way of medical aid in time of need. Even feeding themselves, or keeping a roof over their head was a challenge.

Yes, these new believers faced dangers from the Romans and from their own people, because of their becoming believers of the Messiah, but what is that compared to Noah facing certain death because of a coming flood and the ridicule of all his neighbors; or Moses facing the wrath of Pharaoh and then the people during a 40-year trek in the wilderness. This is where that ‘faith’ comes in for them as they recognize that it was faith that stood with all the great heroes of the past.

A] Hebrews 12: 1 through 2; (read)

1] “*Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us,--”*

After the writer has gone through the list of the great heroes of the past and their great witness of their faith in their lives and accomplishments down through history, he tells the folks, ‘with this to embolden us, why do we fret over the things that harass our lives, when we have the true promise given by God?’ Do we believe in that promise? Then we act in faith, that that promise is true, right?

Now here, as Dr. J. Vernon McGee put it, don’t be stationary, get moving, enter the race and run it. Too many Christians today, are standing in one place looking holy but have no inclination to move forward in their faith, just stay in a safe place. They have built up little if any endurance. Building endurance requires training and practice, the right diet, proper rest but exercising for the race to be run. This is called reading scripture and living in it. Then as I grow in the Word, I am strengthened in the Word, by this point, I MUST also act in the Word.

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 has sat down at the right hand of the Throne of God.”*

The one thing in entering any competition is concentrating on the goal ahead. You can’t run a race and gad about, looking at the scenery going by, as you run. You must set your goal, and then totally concentrate on reaching that goal, not looking to the right or to the left, just at the finish line. I can remember when driving in amateur auto drag races, that if I looked to the side to see the driver beside me possible going past me, I tended to veer in his direction, and at high rates of speed, I might over correct and cause accidents. There is that loss of concentration.

Jesus is the goal, our life in Him is what we are aiming for. And the Joy spoken of here is the JOY He, Jesus, attained after He had endured the cross and the whole shame of the crucifixion, when He finished His race and sat with God taking His rightful place in the throne room.

B] Hebrews 12: 3 through 11; (read)

1] “*For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls.”*

In other words, ponder what Jesus had to endure during His 33 years as a real human. That during His 3 years as bringing the Gospel (Good News) of salvation, preaching against what the Jewish leaders had done to the worship of His Father, and then suffering the ensuing insults, degradation of the whip and finally death on the cross. Think of these things as you face the same insults and dangers, that He faced them first, and take comfort in the promise ahead and the race results.

2] “*You have not yet resisted to bloodshed, striving against sin.”*

My guess here is, these folks had not resisted to their death. There was plenty of bloodshed from the believers and many had died but these, the writer is concerned with, were still walking around. Yes, they were insulted, threatened, excommunicated from the Temple worship as they lived their life tempted at every turn.

3] “*And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons, ‘My son, do not despise the chastenings’ of the Lord, nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; For whom the Lord loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives.’”*

Here the writer quotes from Proverbs 3: 11 and 12. We face disciplining as children, and these are for our training and learning as we grow to show us right from wrong, how to handle difficult situations through disciplined action, and to strengthening us for the hardships ahead. Teaching us to COPE as we are going through trials. As a parent, I want my children trained that they may handle their own difficulties as they go through life. Do we follow this? Sometimes the burned finger is the only way to teach not to touch a hot burner. Sometimes falling off of the horse is the only way to teach how to stay on the horse.

4] “*If you endure chastening, God deals with you as sons; for what son is there who a father does not chasten?”*

As a parent I care that my child learns right from wrong, that he learns to take orders in order that he may learn how to give orders when he is grown. As a father I mete out correction as is needed because I love my child, and truly wish my child to grow up wise, strong, and respected, as he/she is that reflection of me.

5] “*But if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons.”*

And if you are the child who resists the training of the father, what does that make you? As one who claims to be a Christian, but cannot see his/her way to face the hardships that come with being a Christian, what does that make you?

6] “*Furthermore we have human fathers who corrected us and we paid them respect. Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits, and live?*

Frankly, friends, in my family, Mom was the disciplinarian, dad, for some reason was afraid to spank or do what was necessary, but mom was. But the truth of the matter was, we learned to respect those in charge, as they exerted their influence over us. When mom gave us the ‘look’------ well we came to know what that ‘look’ was about and acted accordingly. But for most of you, was the father, as all remember the phrase, ‘Just wait until your father gets home’ that was the phrase of fear, and we acted accordingly.

That being the case, how much more respect should we truly have for your heavenly Father? Were you your dad’s friend or were you his child? \_\_\_\_Think about that one.

7] “*For they indeed, for a few days, chastened us as seemed best to them, but He for our profit. That we may be partakers of His of His holiness.*

In other words, our fathers trained us to obey the rules of the house and the rules in a righteous society, but God trains us in the rules that set us apart from society and make us fit to enter His Family.

8] “*Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; never-the-less, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness, to those who have been trained by it.”*

I found it most interesting when studying and writing my lessons years ago, in Proverbs, how many times it mentions discipline and chastening. These two always bring pain to the body or to the heart. Pain is instruction, (I read that once in a science Fiction novel) and let’s face it, we react to painful circumstances. The desired effect is to learn from the chastisement and move on.

C] Hebrews 12: 12 through 17; (read)

1] “*Therefore, strengthen the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees, and make straight paths for your feet, so what is lame may not be dislocated, but rather be healed.”*

When we have exhausted all our options and feel frustrated, the picture could seem to be, just standing there, head bowed hands hanging with nothing in them and our knees have turned to jelly. (What to do? What to do? We will moan) I think this is a vivid picture of the folks the writer is speaking to, don’t you think?

I can also reference back to a previous verse, where we run the race, and that we fix our eyes on the goal and do not deviate meaning we don’t veer right or left but keep the lane straight. A lot of time, juking this way and that way can wreak havoc on one’s knees. Takes you longer to get to the goal and by that time you are probably limping.

2] “*Pursue peace with all people, and holiness without which no-one will see the Lord: Looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the Grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble and by this many become defiled; lest there be any fornicator or profane person like Esau, who for one morsel of food sold his birthright*.”

After reviewing our race to be run and the discipline it takes to properly run the race, not being discouraged and having a ‘woe is me attitude’ because of the hardships involved, let’s also change the attitude about the people around us. Learn to be at peace with folks. Many times, when someone does me a serious mischief, I look to take revenge or at the least grumble about the injustice of it all.

What we need to be doing is concentrating on our goals and not letting the surrounding animosity affect our performance. Look to the prize God has placed for us and never let the bitterness of the world or my bitterness at the world get in the way of my race toward the goal.

3] “*For you know that afterward, when he wanted to inherit the blessing, he was rejected for he found no place for repentance, though he sought it diligently with tears.”*

The previous verse illustrated the plight of Esau, who was far more interested in getting through life doing his own thing, and family and the resultant inheritance meant nothing to him. When he loses his inheritance after one of his frivolous hunting trips, no amount of pleading or repentant attitude could bring him that which he lost.

D] Hebrews 12: 18 through 24; (read)

1] “*For you have not come to the mountain that may be touched and that burned with fire, and to blackness and darkness and tempest, and the sound of the trumpet, and the voice of the words, so that those who heard it begged that the word should not be spoken to them anymore.”*

Oh, indeed, a complex verse, and the first thing we should note, the word mountain is NOT included in the Greek, but assumed by the translators, what the writer is saying that these Jews, who are now believers, cannot go to the Sinai experience or the Laws. They cannot live in the past, and he refers to the time when the children of Israel being led by the pillar of fire, and all the things associated with the tabernacle. These were frightening occurrences, and they were afraid, they couldn’t face it.

2] “*For they could not endure what was commanded: and if so much as a beast touches the mountain it shall be stoned or shot with an arrow. And so terrifying was the sight that Moses said, ‘I am exceedingly afraid and trembling.’”*

The writer is referring to Exodus 19: 12 and 13, and this verse more or less explains the previous verse. It mentions that no living thing could touch even the foot of the mountain or it dies. It was the fear thing with a fearsome God. And this is saying that was the old, we have gone past that into the new..

3] “*But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the Living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and the Church of the first born who are registered in heaven, to the God the Judge of all , to the spirits of just men made perfect, to Jesus the mediator of the New Covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than Abel.”*

Well, here we have the contrast as the writer is explaining to the people the difference between the old covenant and the new. Here is the New Jerusalem and God’s promise as illustrated. This is what we look for and to what do we see? Angels all over the place, how many and what is it they do, is unknown, but they are there, the general assembly which nobody can completely explain, the Church of the ‘first born’ another mystery. Some believe it might be the earliest believers who honored God with their lives back to the time of first man, to the believers of this time. There were many righteous people back in the ‘olden days’. But we also come to God the great Judge and then to Jesus, the mediator; so all are pictured here in one spot and this is the picture the writer is striving to explain.

E] Hebrews 12: 25 through 29; (read)

1] “*See that you do not refuse Him who speaks. For if they did not escape who refused Him who spoke on earth much more shall we not escape if we turn away from Him who speaks from heaven, --”*

You have this, right? What I can glean here is, the one who spoke on earth is Jesus, and for all that heard Him, how many do you think came to a personal relationship with Him? They hear with their ears but not their hearts. He healed so many, but who stood up for Him at the cross? The unbelievers do not escape their judgment friends. And to be honest we must listen from the heart now as He speaks to us through the Holy Spirit and His Word.

2] *“--Whose voice then shook the earth; but now He has promised, saying, ‘Yet, once more I shake not only the earth but also heaven,--’*

You know, after the Laws at Sinai were finally completed and Moses left the mountain, there was a great earthquake, and as Jesus died on the cross, there was a great earthquake, and at the appointed time there will be a greater and final earthquake that will rattle even the heavens.

3] *“--Yet once more, indicates the removal of those things that are being shaken, as of things that are made, that the things that cannot be shaken will remain.”*

Apparently, this refers to God Himself and all that is His, and all that is man’s will be taken away. Christianity is we belong to God, that cannot be shaken, all else, is waving or shaking in the wind.

4] “*Therefore since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptable with reverence and Godly fear. For our God IS a consuming fire.”*

To sum up this section of the letter, the writer encourages the people, that because of God’s eternal promise we stand tall affix our eyes on the goal striving toward the end, being a doing and serving people full of faith and hope, not wavering in our commitment. And to remember always, God is GOD and we should always be in a fearsome awe, understanding He is not our ‘buddy’, and worshipping Him always in spirit and in truth.