

#18 Hebrews Chapter 11c-12a

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Verse 27: By faith he left Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king; for he endured, as seeing Him who is unseen.

Moses gave up everything the World could offer. Egypt, at that time, was the richest, most powerful kingdom on Earth. Every pleasure, comfort and Earthly delight, as well as every sinful desire mankind had yet discovered were all his, at his fingertips. He didn't have to go looking for anything. It was all his and right before his eyes and yet, he was willing to despise it all, to consider it as nothing in comparison to what he could not even see, for what was invisible. How could he do that? How could anyone?

The writer just told us... by faith... he left Egypt... by faith. Remember, he told us what faith really is... it is not just hoping that something is true or wishing that something was or was not true... but faith is actually the evidence, the tangible, touchable reality of what we are unable to see with our eyes... but faith is not real faith unless it is founded upon reality... the reality of God's Word and upon His faithfulness and trustworthiness. Sometime, somewhere, God had spoken to Moses and Moses had believed God's Word. God had said something like, 'Moses, I have preserved you for My purpose; I saved you from the river and placed you in Pharaoh's palace. My plan is that you to lead My people, Israel, out of Egypt to the land I promised to Abraham. You will have to leave everything you have ever known, you will spend 40 years in the Midian desert and then you will spend another 40 years wandering in the wilderness before I allow the people into the Promised Land and then you will have to die without having entered the Land. But finally, after all that, I will take you to your Heavenly home, to the City whose builder and maker is Me. What do you say? Want to do it?' Moses said, 'Yes, I will do it.'

Moses endured all those 80 years because by faith, he could see God and he could see that future City.

Verse 28: By faith he kept the Passover and the sprinkling of the blood, so that he who destroyed the firstborn would not touch them.

God sent 10 increasingly severe plagues onto the Egyptians to more and more strenuously encourage Pharaoh to release the Israelites, to allow them to go free. The plagues only affected the Egyptians; they were: water turned to blood, frogs, flies, death of livestock, boils, hail and fire, locusts, darkness and finally, the last plague was that God would kill the firstborn of every family and even of their cattle.

In order for Israelite homes to be protected from the last, final, devastating plague, Moses was instructed that every home must kill a lamb and apply the blood of the lamb to the doorway to the home... on both sides and at the top. When God saw the blood of the lamb, applied by faith, He would 'pass over' that home and not kill the firstborn. That's where the word, 'Passover' originates.

'For the LORD will pass through to smite the Egyptians; and when He sees the blood on the lintel and on the two doorposts, the LORD will pass over the door and will not allow the destroyer to come in to your houses to smite you. ²⁴ And you shall observe this event as an ordinance for you and your children forever.' Ex 12:23

Also, for seven days before the 'Passover,' they were to eat nothing with leaven, unleavened bread only.

These two were established, by God, as the yearly feasts of 'Unleavened Bread' and 'Passover.' You can see how God was presenting a picture for the Israelites of His promised coming Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ. He fulfilled both of these feasts on their very days in His final week... in His sinlessness, that having been represented by the seven days of eating only unleavened bread, leaven being a representation of sin, and in His Crucifixion as the Passover Lamb of God Who takes away sin and prevents spiritual death of those who, by faith, believe in Him.

And again, remember, that is the whole point of this book to the Hebrews: the Old Covenant was always a picture of the coming Savior who would complete, fulfill and do away with the Old Covenant, replacing it with the New Covenant while officiating it as our New, Eternal, Heavenly High Priest.

Moses and all the Israelites kept that first Passover by faith. Nothing in their experience would suggest that simply putting a little lamb's blood on your door would keep some of your family members from dying on that

night but they did it anyway, because God told Moses to do it and Moses told the people to do it. After all, by this time, after eight or nine previous plagues, they had begun to see Moses as someone who was hearing from God.

Verse 29: By faith they passed through the Red Sea as though *they were passing* through dry land; and the Egyptians, when they attempted it, were drowned.

Even after all the previous plagues and then the Passover when the 'firstborns' all throughout Egypt were killed... after Pharaoh finally agreed to let the Israelites leave... after they had all gone out, he once again changed his mind and followed after them with his army and chariots to recapture them and bring them back. God told Moses to stretch out his staff over the water of the Red Sea and God parted the water. Israel walked across on dry land between the two walls of the Sea. Behind them, the Egyptians were following.

By faith, by believing in God's Word, Moses led them out of Egypt and through the Red Sea, even as they turned around and saw all of the Egyptians being destroyed by God. For awhile, they all believed God and trusted Him... but only for awhile. I don't think anyone has ever had a more miserable 40 years of ministry leadership than poor old Moses.

Verse 30: By faith the walls of Jericho fell down after they had been encircled for seven days. ³¹ By faith Rahab the harlot did not perish along with those who were disobedient, after she had welcomed the spies in peace.

After their escape from Egypt, Israel wandered in the wilderness for 40 years because they were afraid to go into the land for fear of the giants; they didn't believe or trust God. After 40 years, after everyone above the age of 20 years had died, after Moses died, God lifted up Joshua to lead them in. He sent in 2 spies to search out Jericho in preparation for its defeat. Rahab the harlot, an inhabitant of Jericho, hid the spies and protected them. She believed in God and put her faith in Him and His people. Because she protected them, they protected her and her family and kept them safe when they destroyed Jericho.

It says, 'Now before they lay down (the two spies), she (Rahab) came up to them on the roof, ⁹ and said to the men, "I know that the LORD has given you the land, and that the terror of you has fallen on us, and that all the inhabitants of the land have melted away before you. ¹⁰ For we have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red Sea before you when you came out of Egypt, (this was 40 years later but no one had forgotten... God had glorified Himself in Pharaoh)... and what you did to the two kings of the Amorites who were beyond the Jordan, to Sihon and Og (giant kings), ¹¹ When we heard *it*, our hearts melted and no courage remained in any man any longer because of you; for the LORD your God, He is God in heaven above and on earth beneath. Now therefore, please swear to me by the LORD, since I have dealt kindly with you, that you also will deal kindly with my father's household, and give me a pledge of trust, and spare my father and my mother and my brothers and my sisters, with all who belong to them, and deliver our lives from death.'" Joshua 2:8

By faith, Joshua believed God and defeated Jericho: God gave Joshua some strange instructions for how to defeat Jericho; there was an enormous wall protecting the city. God told Joshua to have the Israelites, all their men of war, with Priests carrying the Ark of the Covenant, along with seven priests carrying seven rams' horns, circle the city once a day for six days, walking in silence. On the seventh day they were to silently circle around the city seven times again, no one saying a word. After the seventh time, the priests were to blow the trumpets with one long, loud blast and all the people were to shout loudly; God then caused the walls to fall straight down allowing the Israelite army to enter and completely destroy the city.

Rahab, a harlot, was the only person in all of Jericho who chose to trust and believe in the true God, the God of Israel. She was a gentile who became an ancestor of the Lord Jesus Christ. She married Salmon, an Israelite (perhaps he was one of the two spies); their son was Boaz who married Ruth, another gentile, and their son was Obed, the father of Jesse, the father of King David.

By faith, Rahab trusted in God. She was saved and it had nothing whatsoever to do with keeping any law at all; it was only by faith, which is why she's on this list. Salvation is now, and always has been, only by faith in God's Word.

Verse 32: And what more shall I say? For time will fail me if I tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets, ³³ who by faith conquered kingdoms, performed acts of righteousness, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions, ³⁴ quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, from weakness were made strong, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight.

God saw fit to refrain from expounding on the faithfulness of all these people so we will too. Simply, every one of them are used by the writer of Hebrews to further convince his Hebrew readers, who were already very familiar with everyone on the list and of all that each had done, that salvation has always been according to faith and never the result of keeping the Law or even 'trying their best' to keep the Law. Trying our best is no better than not trying at all. Our efforts at righteousness are meaningless and even disastrously dangerous if we ever think that they contribute in any way to our standing before God. The writer has been proving, through examples from those under the Old Covenant, that our salvation, our right standing before God, our righteousness is only... only by faith in the righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ and His finished work on the Cross.

Verse 35: Women received *back* their dead by resurrection; and others were tortured, not accepting their release, so that they might obtain a better resurrection; ³⁶ and others experienced mockings and scourgings, yes, also chains and imprisonment. ³⁷ They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were tempted, they were put to death with the sword; they went about in sheepskins, in goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, ill-treated ³⁸ (*men* of whom the world was not worthy), wandering in deserts and mountains and caves and holes in the ground.

Men and women of God have always been persecuted. We live in the kingdom of darkness. We are created to be salt and light in the decay and darkness of the World system. We can clearly see persecution coming even to this nation now, which has always been, at least until recently, the seemingly last place on Earth where it was still safe to be a believer and follower of the Lord Jesus Christ but that is fast changing all around us. Soon, even here, it will become increasingly difficult for anyone to publicly proclaim the Lord Jesus Christ. The Rapture is coming soon and Judgment is coming soon to this nation and to the whole World.

Verse 39: And all these, having gained approval through their faith, did not receive what was promised, because God had provided something better for us, so that apart from us they would not be made perfect. They all gained God's approval, His 'good testimony' of them through their faith... not by works of the Law or by any good works. None of them received what God had promised; they all died before the coming of the Messiah, the Salvation of God, and they all died without receiving the promise of that Eternal City. God provided something better for us: we received the New Covenant; we have been given eternal life as well as God's Holy Spirit within us. We, as the body of Jesus Christ, His Bride, have been made one with Him... something none of the Old Testament believers ever received.

They all died and their souls went to Hades, the place of the dead where they were kept, waiting for the coming of the Savior, Jesus Christ. When He died, He went there and led them out, taking them back to Heaven with Him. It says that 'apart from us, they would not be made perfect.' At the Rapture, their earthly bodies will be raised and they will receive their glorified eternal bodies, at the moment just before we are raised and also receive our eternal bodies. Our salvation will be perfect and complete at the same time as theirs is also... we just will not have had to die physically.

Now, it is possible that the Old Testament Saints received eternal bodies after the Crucifixion when Jesus Christ retrieved them from Hades because when Paul is referring to the Rapture, he says, 'the **dead in Christ** shall rise first.' The Old Testament Saints were not 'in Christ.' Only we, the Church, are 'in Christ' and He in us. That's the great mystery Paul spoke of: '**Christ in you, the hope of glory.**'

Chapter 12: **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,

The cloud of witnesses surrounding us is not people in Heaven who are looking down and cheering us on. They are not hearing our prayer or praying for us. Nothing in Scripture even hints of anything like that. There are no 'special Christians' in Heaven who are called Saints. Every born again believer is a saint. We are all completely holy and righteous in God's sight because our righteousness is only the righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ which has been imputed to us. We will receive varying degrees of eternal rewards when we stand before God, but none of us are any less righteous or any more righteous than any other born again believer. Our righteousness is complete because the sacrifice for sin of the Lord Jesus Christ was complete.

Paul... I'm going to call the writer of Hebrews, 'Paul' from now on, instead of 'the writer of Hebrews,' because after having gone through this book so much more carefully than ever before, it seems to me that there are enough similarities between this book and all of the books on which we do have Paul's name, that for me, it seems likely that Paul is the one who wrote it. Whether he did or didn't, it doesn't really matter because ultimately, the author of Hebrews and all 65 other books of the Bible is, in fact, the very same person... the Holy Spirit.

He has just given us this extensive list of Old Testament Saints who lived their lives by faith and who died without ever seeing the fulfillment of God's promises. Because they lived by faith, by believing God's Word, they pleased God and their faith was accounted to them as righteousness... just like us under the New Covenant... we believe God's Word and it is accounted to us as righteousness.

Paul uses the illustration of a race, a long distance race, to describe our Christian walk while here on Earth. The picture he is painting is of an athlete running a race, doing whatever is necessary to not only finish the race, but to win the race. When we studied Ephesians, we saw Paul paint the picture of our being in a wrestling match and in a battle requiring supernatural armor. Remember, he said, 'And having done all to stand, stand firm!' Having done all... whatever was necessary... stand firm. Here he is saying, 'having done whatever is necessary, run the long distance race to win. This is not jogging or running on a treadmill. It is covering ground from here to there with our eyes on the prize, our eyes on the goal, fixing our eyes on Jesus. He says, 'lay aside every encumbrance.' This is not sin because the very next words are, 'and the sin...' The picture is of running a race with weights fastened to our legs and feet. Things that slow us down, that get in our way, that keep us from running to win. Encumbrances can be different things for different people. We are not all encumbered by the same things... an encumbrance to you may not be one for me at all.

He is writing to us, but first, he is writing to this group of Hebrews, most are believers, some are not. When he says, 'Let us...' he is including all of them... those who are true believers and those who are not yet. Only those who are truly born again are even in the race. We enter the race when we put our faith and trust in the Lord Jesus Christ. Hangers on... those on the fringe... those who have not really made up their minds yet... they are not even in the race. The first major encumbrance that any of these had to lay aside was Judaistic legalism, all the ritual, works, ceremonies... it would strangle their race of faith. They would be encumbered also by fear of persecution. He wants to encourage them to run with all their might... 'forgetting what lies behind.' The good and the bad... forgetting the victories, forgetting the defeats. All that matters now is the race that God has set before us... before each of us.

Judaistic legalism would strangle their walk of faith. And any other kind of legalism will strangle our walk of faith: thou shalt or shalt not do this or that. There is absolutely nothing we can or cannot do that will make us, in any way, more or less acceptable to God. Either we are completely righteous and acceptable in His eyes because of our faith in Jesus Christ... or we are completely unrighteous and unacceptable in His sight because our faith is in anything other than the Lord Jesus Christ and His finished work on the Cross.

God intends for us to stay where He has put us... in the race He has set before us... each of us. So often we want to be somewhere else, be doing something else, be with someone else... He has called us to stand firm...to learn patience and endurance.

My race is not your race but it is the race God planned for me. For now... the majority of my race consists of taking care of one little old lady who has gotten to the point of no longer being able to do anything for herself.

The most important thing to God, in any of our individual races is that we submit to allowing Him to form us more and more into the image and likeness of the Lord Jesus Christ and the most important attributes of Jesus Christ that God seeks to instill into each of us are patience, faithfulness, endurance and obedience. It is much easier for God to form those things in me... little by little... when He has me in a place where He can command my full attention. For example: if I was God... I would have caused me to be a highly successful Christian singer/songwriter and speaker... I would have caused others to notice me... I would have recorded records and written books and maybe even have a big Church... but if that were the case... none of those attributes of Jesus Christ would be forming and growing within me. I'd be treated like a star... like I was better than 'regular' Christians... better than the little people... like they should look up to me... and I would naturally be believing the very same thing. In fact, when I was younger and even more devastatingly handsome than I am now... pretty girls would have been making eyes at me as I sang from the stage... I might not have been able to resist them... in fact, I probably would have fallen in many more areas than I actually did. But since none of that is happening and since God has placed me in a race that is seemingly small and humble, I can see Him teaching me patience and endurance; and it's a race that isn't too difficult for me... I can stick with it. Also, since He has even given me the privilege of teaching you... it makes me stay in the Word and study it more than I would without you... so thank you.

The Greek word here for race is *agon*, from which we get, *agony*... run till it hurts and then keep running till the end. For someone who is comfortable being up in front of others... it hurts to be invisible and ignored. The desire for recognition, to be seen and appreciated can be a real encumbrance. He tells us to lay aside every encumbrance. Some encumbrances, you can't really lay aside... I can't lay that aside... it's always there, so I have to concentrate, focus and remind myself of what's most important. To God... it's very important that I willingly and patiently care for His little daughter. Allowing God to teach me patience is far more important to Him than is my being recognized by others. Seeking to be like Jesus Christ will bring great reward. Being exalted by others will bring nothing.

We all must lay aside every encumbrance; no one who plans to run in a race and win, trains by having meals of bacon and donuts, or ice cream and cookies. The sugar and the fat will keep anyone from winning or even running. No one who plans to run a long distance race and win smokes 3 packs of cigarettes a day. Excess weight will keep a runner from winning; shortness of breath will do the same. Many things can encumber us and even if an encumbrance is not sin, it can become sin if it becomes an idol, something that we put before our relationship with God.

A good runner is always training... always disciplining himself, denying his flesh and feeding his spirit. He works to get in shape and stay in shape.

Paul writes, 'Not that I have already obtained *it* or have already become perfect, but I press on so that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus.¹³ Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of *it* yet; but one thing *I do*: forgetting what *lies* behind and reaching forward to what *lies* ahead,¹⁴ I press on toward the goal for the prize of the ***upward call of God*** in Christ Jesus. Phpp 3:12 And... 'I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith;⁸ in the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but ***also to all who have loved His appearing.*** 2 Tim 4:7

I have finished the course... I ran to win... God will reward me.

His goal is when we will stand before the Lord Jesus Christ and hear Him say, 'Well done, good and faithful servant.'

The upward call of God...all who have loved His appearing... Paul is talking about the Rapture. I strain forward, keeping my heart and mind on the Lord Jesus Christ... listening for the shout of God to 'Come up here!' as He appears in the clouds.

He says, 'run the race that is set before us...' We are not any of us running the same race. We are not running against each other... we are the only ones in our particular race with the Lord Jesus Christ at the finish line,

urging us on, with the Holy Spirit always alongside us, encouraging, urging, strengthening and protecting. He hasn't called any of us to run someone else's race or to be like someone else. Our only example, the only one we are to seek to be like, is the Lord Jesus Christ.

We are all running together and are to be encouraging one another, but each of us are on our own individual race. Alone, we are weak and frail but others are running with us and the Holy Spirit is always right with us.

The Holy Spirit encourages us by reminding us of His Word... and of this great cloud of witnesses... those who have gone before... those who were successful in their life of faith but ultimately, by reminding us of Jesus.

Verse 2: 'fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter, the finisher, of faith'

He is the One Who put our faith into us, He is the One Who enabled us to believe in Him and His Word and He is the One Who will guard our faith, cause it to grow and finally to perfect it and take us home.

Jesus Christ is the One we should be focusing on... He is the perfect example of faith. He believed God. He believed God would carry Him all the way through the Crucifixion to resurrection and glorification. The same is true for us. Whatever the race is that God has called us to... as we are faithful in it, He will reward us and glorify us. Jesus Christ sat down at the right hand of the Father. We will sit on His throne with Him. Jesus Christ will rule over the nations; we will rule and reign with Him forever. Patience now will produce glory and reward then.

He is our example of faith. He believed what God had said in His Word... He knew Who He was and He believed what the Word of God said would be the end and outcome of His faithfulness as the Messiah. He knew He would be killed and He knew He would be glorified. He believed God so He always obeyed.

When we believe God, we obey. When we don't believe God, we disobey and we sin. Sin is always an act of disbelief... always. When we disobey, when we sin... it's the result of disbelieving His Word. If we believe His Word, we will obey. If we believe what His Word says about our being rewarded for obedience, we will obey. If we don't believe it's really true, we will get caught up in believing that indulging our flesh, of having the pleasure of sin for a season or a moment is more attractive than the reward we cannot see.

That's why He tells us to 'Set our minds on the things above, not on the things of the Earth.'

His Word tells us that 'Eye has not seen, ear has not heard... no one has seen and no one has heard; no one has even imagined what God has in store for those who love Him. 1 Cor 2:9 And Jesus said, if you love Me, you will keep my commandments.

If we really believed that God has promised unimaginable rewards for our faithful obedience, we would never willingly disobey ever. The problem is: since we can't imagine the things He has planned for us... we can't imagine them so, if we can't imagine them... we can't imagine them.

We allow our imaginations to stop and not go beyond what we normally think about. Most of us are wise enough that we realize that nothing here on Earth is truly satisfying; everything here is ultimately worthless; it will all be destroyed. Therefore, unless we force ourselves to imagine beyond our imagination, we can't conceive of anything that is of eternal value; therefore we give up and decide to just go ahead and do or have that thing that we know is sinful because at least, we can see it or hear it or feel it or smell or taste it.

Adam and Eve fell for the temptation of the fruit that was right before them. Judas fell for something as meaningless as 30 pieces of silver. Esau fell for something as inconsequential as a bowl of stew. David fell for something as empty as the physical beauty of Bathsheba.

All of these and so many more... instead of running their race, fixing their eyes upon Jesus, they looked to the right and to the left and stopped running. They despised and disregarded unimaginable rewards, both Earthly and Heavenly for the thing that they could experience here and now.

Let us continue on, running our race, setting our hearts and minds on the things above, fixing our eyes on Jesus, listening for the upward call of God and looking for His coming. Be patient and enduring.