

Consider Jesus: Resources for the Race (Part 2) Hebrews 12:1-29

In Hebrews 12 the author is reminding his readers of the resources available to everyone in Christ - particularly those resources for "running the race" of faith in an enduring fashion. Last month we zeroed in on the living illustration of Christ Himself (12:1-3). His enduring, faithful Life is not merely the model we try to copy, but the very means (within us) to rely upon at every point of need.

In verses 4 - 13 we are also prompted to call to mind the unending love of our heavenly Father Who is always for us. Forever seeking our highest good, He is making use of all things to grow us up into His mature sons and daughters. In that light we see He is no permissive, neglectful parent! He loves us enough to "discipline" us (12:6,7). His discipline is not past oriented (=punishment), but future oriented (= training) - so we might learn not to believe the same errors, make the same poor choices over and over again.

In order to "run the race" well... "with endurance"... in any area - academics, athletics, music - discipline is an imperative. A proper view of God's loving discipline is critical to laying hold of the heart and mind of God, particularly in the midst of sorrowful times (12:11). In the hands of God such times are meaningful - sorrow is meant to be redemptive, pain is meant to be instructive. The losses we experience in the seen and temporary are meant to yield unseen and eternal gain (Ro 8:18). God's loving discipline is always at work... "for our good" (12:10)... not what seems or feels good - but what IS good! There are to be no pampered babies, entitled children, spoiled teenagers in God's family. His disciplinary training is evidence of His Love, our belonging to Him. Suffering that leads to truth and liberty (= Christ-likeness) is preferable to comfort that leads to error and bondage.

Don't overlook the key word "afterwards" in 12:11. Seasons of affliction are designed to be productive (II Cor 4:17). They may result in a deeper "sharing in His holiness", into becoming purer and purer expressions of His uncommon character. (12:10) They often yield "righteous fruit" (12:11) - pruning does not "punish" the vine, but rather "trains" it to be more fruitful (Jo 15:2). And such periods usually make us better caretakers of others (12:12,13). We come out on the other side with a new found empathy for the weak, worn out, and weary. We are more likely to come alongside them in their distress with the gift of enduring love we received in our own distress. What we freely received, we freely give (Matt 10:8). In the midst of it all, we become some of God's resources for the race - bringing energy and encouragement to those who feel like quitting!

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Greetings

Seen rightly, every day in the Christian's life is Easter - a celebration of the crucified, risen Life of Christ! Although there may be nothing wrong with observing a day or a season that acknowledges the resurrection, there would definitely be something wrong with any Christian believer who lives out of that living reality once a year, or only seasonally!

Our crucified, risen (newly created) life in Christ is a glorious eternal reality. Without question, however, it must be lived daily. For the time being, at least, there are daily choices to be made concerning our eternal salvation. Call it what you like - abiding in Christ, being led by the Spirit, presenting our bodies (and all they contain) to God as living and holy sacrifices - yet, sons and daughters of God by Diving choice must faithfully cooperate with human consent.

Sinners may be called to a once and forever salvation, but saints are called to daily cooperation. A daily "Yes" to Christ-likeness is a daily "No" to self-determination. A daily "No" to self-interest is a daily "Yes" to the interests of others. A daily "Yes" to the Spirit is a daily "No" to the flesh. And on it goes - day by day, week by week, month by month - we deny who we once were and embrace who we now are. I can't think of a better way to celebrate Easter - the gift of the crucified, risen life of Christ in us - every day of the year!

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