

"God's Love Story Sermon Outlines"

by Doug Hamilton

Section 38: Running with God's Love Story (The Book of Hebrews)

The year was about AD 68 and the first generation Christians were being tempted to come back to Judaism. In Jerusalem there had been an angry movement in rebellion against Rome. The taxation, cruel authoritarian leadership and poor treatment by foreigners had become too much for some of the Jews. For the last couple years a certain patriotic sect called the "Zealots" decided they had enough of it and rebelled. Killing many Roman citizens and taking over the temple grounds, chaos enveloped the city. Sensing the great danger of a Roman invasion, another group of Jews warred with the Zealots, resulting in the "Great Jewish War". While holed up in the temple, the Zealots secretly called in 20,000 Edomites to their defense with the result being several thousands of deaths. It was too much for Caesar to tolerate, therefore he sent the Roman army to crush the rebellion. As word spread around the empire about Jerusalem's perilous situation and Jewish citizens abroad were influenced, including many Jewish Christian converts. They felt compelled to return to Jerusalem for three reasons:

1. They were patriotic and sought to help their motherland. Rome had oppressed the people for decades and they felt the need to be united with their brothers.
2. Jewish parents and other family members back in Jerusalem sent word to their disowned children, promising to forgive their conversion to Christ, writing them back into the will and returning their property. It was a tempting offer of consolation.
3. The temptation to stay on the narrow path had become rather difficult. It was much easier to live as a Jew with low standards than a Christian with high standards. Christ was cramping the styles of some in the faith, tempting them to return to their old ways of living.

With such an emotional pull to leave the faith, Jewish Christians throughout the empire were being persuaded to return back to Judaism. Someone needed to say something to them and that someone was likely Luke, the proposed writer of Hebrews. He consistently reinforced the need to stay faithful to the covenant of Christ regardless of the reasons to leave. He pointed out the futility of the old ways and the need to be faithful to Christ on every level.

- Hebrews 2:1 For this reason we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away *from it*.
- Hebrews 3:12 Take care, brethren, that there not be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart that falls away from the living God.
- Hebrews 4:1 Therefore, let us fear if, while a promise remains of entering His rest, any one of you may seem to have come short of it.
- Hebrews 4:14 Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession.
- Hebrews 6:1-2 Therefore leaving the elementary teaching about the Christ, let us press on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God ² of instruction about washings and laying on of hands, and the resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment.

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- Hebrews 10:26-27 For if we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins,²⁷ but a terrifying expectation of judgment and THE FURY OF A FIRE WHICH WILL CONSUME THE ADVERSARIES.

That leads us to the opening primary text of Hebrews 10:32-39. It was at that point the Hebrew writer calls into remembrance their early sufferings and sacrifices which were made.

Hebrews 10:32-39 But remember the former days, when, after being enlightened, you endured a great conflict of sufferings,³³ partly by being made a public spectacle through reproaches and tribulations, and partly by becoming sharers with those who were so treated.³⁴ For you showed sympathy to the prisoners and accepted joyfully the seizure of your property, knowing that you have for yourselves a better possession and a lasting one.³⁵ Therefore, do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward.³⁶ For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God, you may receive what was promised.³⁷ FOR YET IN A VERY LITTLE WHILE, HE WHO IS COMING WILL COME, AND WILL NOT DELAY.³⁸ BUT MY RIGHTEOUS ONE SHALL LIVE BY FAITH; AND IF HE SHRINKS BACK, MY SOUL HAS NO PLEASURE IN HIM.³⁹ But we are not of those who shrink back to destruction, but of those who have faith to the preserving of the soul.

The writer embarked on a series of terms which had an overtone of the competitive games from the ancient times. The word used for “*conflict*” in verse 32 was *athlesis*, meaning the struggle of an athlete. The word used for “*public spectacle*” in verse 33 was *theatrizo*, referring to that which was done before the crowd. He boldly charged them in verse 36 by saying “*You have need of endurance!*” The word used for “*endurance*” was *hupomeno*, meaning to bravely and trustfully withstand that which is burdensome. Just like a team coach would encourage his athlete to endure a race in the Olympic Games, the writer of Hebrews was encouraging his teammates to finish strongly their race toward heaven through Jesus Christ.

On the other hand, there were many in the coliseum of the world railing against them, but the Christians were to press on. The world wanted them to give up through the great sufferings inflicted, calling for them to give up and to stop running the race. The Hebrew writer said for them to “*not throw away*” their confidence in Christ, for they have a greater reward in heaven.

It is important to understand the rewards of all the Olympic champions from the ancient world. If an athlete won his competition, he would receive a life-long three-fold prize. #1) He would become tax exempt for life. #2) He would have an olive-branched crown called the *stephanos* placed on his head by Caesar himself. This crown would be proudly worn the remainder of his life for all to see that he was a champion. #3) He would receive front row seats for life to all future games in the empire. This would make for a very impressive showing with a coliseum having many former champions looking on.

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It is in the third award, having a front seat to all future games, that we begin the great chapter of faith, Hebrews eleven. The Hebrews writer wanted the Christians to not only know that they were in a race to the finish line for the cause of Christ, but to also look up in the stands and see all the other past champions of the faith in the front rows. The individuals listed in chapter eleven make up not the "Hall of Fame", but the "Hall of Faith". It was from them that a whole new level of confidence could be emphasized.

The Hall of Faith: Former Champions

Hebrews 11:1 Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. The key word from the onset of the chapter confirms the common theme, FAITH. Welcome to the *Hall of Faith*.

- Abel: He demonstrated faith in the promise of a better future when he made to God from his offering of the firstlings of the flock (Gen 4:4). Hebrews 4:4 says Abel "*obtained the testimony that he was righteous*", overcoming the deadly oppression of his brother Cain. He was a champion for God because he had the endurance to finish the race.
- Enoch: Enoch was the seventh generation from Adam. He lived during a difficult period of ungodliness (Gen 5:21-24). It states in *Jude 14-15* *It was also about these men that Enoch, in the seventh generation from Adam, prophesied, saying, "Behold, the Lord came with many thousands of His holy ones, ¹⁵ to execute judgment upon all, and to convict all the ungodly of all their ungodly deeds which they have done in an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him."* He could see the judgment of God upon his ungodly generation. He stayed faithful to God even when the world was going her wicked ways. He had endurance to finish the race.
- Noah: While all the world was *evil continually* (Gen 6:5), *corrupt and filled with violence* (Gen 6:11), Noah held to the righteousness of God (Gen 6:9). He obeyed the command to build the ark, putting his full faith in God's promise. He could have gone the along with the evil of the earth, but lived a life of faithfulness unto God. That is why he is in the Hall of Faith, for he had endurance.
- Abraham: He had it made in Ur, possessing a family, wealth and comfort. God asked him to go to a new land for blessing and he obeyed the command. He did so out of faith. *He was looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God* (Heb. 11:10). By faith he offered up his son Isaac upon the altar, for "*He considered that God is able to raise people even from the dead*" (Heb. 11:19). He was referred to as the "*father of many nations*" (Gen. 17:5; Rom. 4:17) because he demonstrated the faith of a champion by living a life of endurance.
- Isaac: He saw the future blessing of God through bestowing his blessing upon Jacob (Heb. 11:20) even when among the immoral and godless Esau (Heb. 12:16). He ran the race with endurance.

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- Jacob: When he blessed the sons of Joseph, it was with faith in the promises to come. Jacob was trusting in the plan of God, for he was a champion of faith. He ran the race with endurance.
- Joseph: He gave orders after his death in Egypt to have his bones taken for burial in Israel following the exodus (Heb. 11:22). This is because he had faith in Promises Land proclamation of God. Though he was dead, his faith lived through the action carried out nearly four centuries later. He was a champion in the front row because he ran his race with endurance.
- Moses: He endured the death threat made by Pharaoh by floating on a basket. When he was tempted with sin for a season by staying a princely son, he refused, trading it for a shepherd's job in a desert (Ex 2:15). He did this "*considering the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt; for he was looking to the reward* (Heb. 11:26). He did all this with the faith in the promises of God. Moses was in the front row of the games because he had endurance with God unto the end of the race.
- Rahab: By faith she received the spies into her home, received a promise and sent them out another way. She was not destined for destruction when those walls of Jericho fell because she endured the race until the end. She was a champion in the faith.
- Gideon: He was willing to listen to God, follow his advice and win in the battle with only three-hundred men because he had faith. He had endurance unto the end.
- Barak: He was the general under Dinah the Judge. He went up against the deadly force of Canaanites and won. It was not because he was mighty and powerful, but that he had faith it would be done because God said so. He endured to the end and is a champion because of it.
- Samson: Though he started off good and strayed away toward the end, Samson came back to the Lord in the end. Being blinded and enslaved, he begged to God for one more burst of strength to crush the Philistines. God granted the favor and Samson killed more Philistines in his death than in his life. Samson is on that front row, cheering the Christians on, because he had endurance as well.
- Jephthah: He went up against the wicked and powerful Ammonites because he had faith in the promises of God. He endured to the end and became a victorious, front row champion of the faith.
- David: He was the man after the heart of God and it showed in his life. Over and over again, from the death of Goliath all the way to his own deathbed, there was a great faith. He wasn't perfect, but he was very faithful. He was a champion in the faith because he endured to the end of the race.
- Samuel and the Prophets: Samuel and all the prophets of God were faithful through persecution even unto death. Some were ridiculed, some were beaten, some sawn in half, some lost family members, some were run through with swords and some were exiled. They all went through severe times, but were faithful unto the end. They endured and are now front row champions ready to cheer on the others.

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Hebrews 12:1-3 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, ² fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. ³ For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

Running athletes in that day trained in a four day cycle of Preparation, Intensity, Rest and Medium Intensity. It was during the second day of the training cycle that was the toughest workout for the runners. The runners would run extremely long and strenuous paths with three pound weights in each hand. The weights were added to build upper body strength in preparation for the real race in the future. During the day of the real competition, the weights were set aside so he could run the race with diligence.

It was not a set of three pound weights which hindered the "Hebrews" Christians in their run of faith, but the weights of sin and doubt. With the former champions cheering them on from the front row, it was their turn to run. They were to run that race with endurance! They were to fix their eyes on the ultimate Champion of all time, Jesus Christ. He ran that race of faith through the cross of Calvary all the way to the throne of God.

Application:

Brothers and sisters, now is the time, this is the place and our lives are the race! Do you hear the former champions from the Hall of Faith, cheering from the front row? Do you see Jesus standing at the finish line, holding a crown? Are you holding your training weights in your hands while standing at the starting line?

- Shed those weights of fear, for today is the race of faith.
- Set aside the weight of sin which holds us back and run with endurance.
- Drop the weights of doubt from your hands and press on to the prize.
- Run that race strong! Keep those eyes on Jesus! Hear the former champions cheering you on to the finish line! That is where God's Love Story is taking us!