

I.N.I.

Lenten III: ENDURANCE

March 11, 2012

John 19:1-6; Heb. 12:1-3

In Christ Jesus, who endured whipping and humiliation for us, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

Water and the Towel: You think of Jesus washing the disciples' feet. Object lesson: **CLEANSING**, we need to be cleansed by Christ's shed blood from all the filth and stains of our wretched sins in thought, word and deed.

Rooster and the Tears: You think of Peter, of his denial of the Lord and of his tears of repentance. Object lesson: **STEADFASTNESS**, we need a firm hold to Christ and His Word, we need to be established in Jesus.

This morning we look at two more objects: the **CROWN OF THORNS and the WHIP**. This is only a miniature replica of a whip. The real whip that ripped Jesus' back was made of leather strips with little pieces of bone or metal on the ends that would tear at the skin. This is just a miniature crown made of grape vines, the real crown on Jesus' head was made of thorns and not just laid gently, but pounded and crushed into His head with a stick. Such was the cruel treatment that our Savior **ENDURED** for us. And that is the Object lesson for this morning: **ENDURANCE**.

We read from John 19:1-6---

Faced with a restless crowd, Pilate subjects Jesus to the abuse of the soldiers. Maybe then the crowd would be satisfied. He had Jesus whipped, the metal or bone pieces tearing away at His skin. They shove a crown of thorns on His head, dress Him up in a purple robe and mockingly say, **HAIL, KING OF THE JEWS!** To appease the crowd, Pilate had Jesus tortured in such a way, but it didn't work. The bloodthirsty crowd would have no mercy on this poor Rabbi who had declared Himself to be the Son of God.

HERE IS THE MAN! Pilate declares. What a pathetic looking figure, a black and blue swollen face, blood matting His hair and trickling down His brow into His eyes. Here is the man you accused of wanting to be king. Here is the man you have been making this big fuss over. Here is the man you want executed. Pilate is hoping the people will say, **HE HAS HAD ENOUGH! LET THE POOR MAN GO.** But the chief priests and Jewish leaders cry out on cue, **CRUCIFY! CRUCIFY!** Jesus **ENDURED** it all!

Have you ever heard the story of the distracted dog? It applies to our lesson this morning. The story is about a dog who saw a squirrel and began to run after it; suddenly a cat crossed its path and he began chasing the cat; suddenly a rabbit was spotted and he began chasing the rabbit and suddenly a rat ran past and the dog chased the rat. The rat ran into his hole and the dog collapsed barking outside the rat hole. The moral of the story: **KEEP YOUR EYES FOCUSED ON YOUR GOAL OR YOU'LL GET NOTHING.** The dog was distracted by everything that came his way and he ended up with nothing at all---not the squirrel, not the cat, not the rabbit, not even the rat.

I'm sure the author to the Hebrews did not know the story of the distracted dog, but what he tells us in our second sermon text is a very important lesson on **RUNNING A RACE KEEPING ONLY YOUR GOAL IN MIND.**

We read from Hebrews 12:1-3---

In Chapter 11 of this letter to the Hebrews, the author lists the many Old Testament heroes of faith: Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Gideon, Samuel, David and the prophets who gave their lives for their LORD. He then begins chapter 12 with these words **THEREFORE, WE ALSO, SINCE WE ARE SURROUNDED BY SO GREAT A CLOUD OF WITNESSES...** The picture that he is drawing is one in which we are in a huge auditorium, with all the past Old Testament saints in the stands, the past spiritual heroes who have already run their race of faith, who persevered to the end in Christ and received the Crown of Life. We look up and we see the Bible heroes of long ago whom we learned about when we were little children, and now it is our turn, your turn and mine. The race has begun, how will you run? Will you **ENDURE**?

The first encouragement and advice we are given is to be as lean and light as possible. The heavier we weigh, the more clothes we wear, the slower we run and the faster we tire out. Imagine running a marathon in a heavy coat with heavy steel-toed work boots on, or running a marathon 150-200 pounds overweight. Well that is exactly what we are told not to do in our text. **LET US LAY ASIDE EVERY WEIGHT, AND THE SIN WHICH SO EASILY ENSNARES US...** When we allow one temptation after another to ensnare us with its sinful pleasures and desires we are weighing ourselves down and our race becomes harder and harder to run. The moment we fall for Satan's schemes and the allurements of this world the more weight we place upon our souls and the more spiritually lazy and apathetic we become till finally we stop running the race altogether. Our feet get heavy, our eyes get distracted and we don't keep them focused on the goal: **ETERNAL LIFE**.

As we run the race for LIFE, we need to ask ourselves, "will my doing this weigh me down, drag me down spiritually and slow me up or distract me in my race for LIFE." It may not in itself be sinful, but if that decision or action or situation draws us away from our goal, distracts us from our goal or slows us down in running our race, then we must cast it aside.

For the race for LIFE must be run with **ENDURANCE!** Literally this word means **PATIENCE, PERSEVERANCE**. Effort and hard work goes into running the race for LIFE. The goal of Eternal Life has already been secured. Christ has earned it for us. But before we can glory in it and enjoy its blessings there is a life to live, a race to run. Christ is the beginning of the race and the end of it. He is the Author of our faith, having sent the Holy Spirit into our hearts through His Word to create faith and He is the fulfillment of our faith, the Object, the One in whom we trust.

So we are told **LET US FIX OUR EYES ON JESUS...** The past saints who surround us are incentives to us. Their examples of faithfulness in their respective generations should spur us on to be faithful in our generation. Yet by looking to them we do not receive the strength or power to carry on. Also if we look at each other, our fellow runners, we will either become complacent since we seem to be so much further ahead of some; or we become despairing because we think we will never catch those ahead of us. We must keep our eyes focused, **FIXED ON JESUS**. And that can only come about when we LOOK to God's Word, when we focus our hearts and minds on what God tells us in His Word.

That is what Jesus did as He **ENDURED** the crown of thorns and the whipping. Jesus ran the race for LIFE for us. He **ENDURED** the agony of suffering and the cross and He did it with JOY! How could He do that? Our second text tells us **FOR THE JOY THAT WAS SET BEFORE HIM (JESUS) ENDURED THE CROSS, DESPISING THE SHAME, AND HAS SAT DOWN AT THE RIGHT HAND OF THE THRONE OF GOD.**

Why and how did Jesus **ENDURE** the agonies of the mockery, the beatings, the whippings,

the pain filled crown on His head, the crucifixion, the rejection of His Father? Because He had a loving purpose: the joy of redeeming and saving His people. Every time that whip cut into His back; every time the soldiers clubbed Him on the head forcing that crown of thorns deeper and deeper into His head, Jesus thought of His Father's words: **GOD SO LOVED THE WORLD THAT HE GAVE HIS ONLY BEGOTTEN SON...HE WAS WOUNDED FOR OUR TRANSGRESSIONS, HE WAS BRUISED FOR OUR INIQUITIES, THE CHASTISEMENT FOR OUR PEACE WAS UPON HIM, AND BY HIS STRIPES WE ARE HEALED...FOR THE TRANSGRESSION OF MY PEOPLE HE WAS STRICKEN, YOU MAKE HIS SOUL AN OFFERING FOR SIN.** Jesus said in John 17:4 **I HAVE GLORIFIED YOU ON THE EARTH. I HAVE FINISHED THE WORK WHICH YOU HAVE GIVEN ME TO DO.**

Two Wednesdays from now in our Savior's Passion History we will hear of how Pilate handed Jesus over to the soldiers. This meant that they could do to Jesus as they pleased, short of killing him. Torture, cruel physical and emotional torment, anything goes, and it did. Spitting, beating, whipping, mocking, taunting, dressing Him up as a king. How could Jesus **ENDURE** all of this? Why didn't He just shout "STOP! I CAN'T TAKE IT ANYMORE! I'VE HAD ENOUGH!"

Because Jesus focused His heart and mind upon His Father's promises in His Word, promises of forgiveness through His sacrifice, promises of eternal life for all who believe in Him. His eyes were focused upon the real outcome, the goal of His sufferings and death, the **REDEMPTION AND SALVATION OF MANKIND.**

And in that lies the lesson for us this morning. A lesson on **ENDURANCE!** People have characterized our society as a wimpy one, one that wants what's easiest and fastest. A society that is not willing to work hard and endure to the end for what is good and lasting. An entitlement society. Is that true? In many ways it is. Our government in many ways encourages that kind of thinking. Many of our middle aged workers expect much and put out little in effort. Many of our youth look for the easiest jobs, expect the best of pay and think they should start out at the top and if they don't they quit at the drop of a hat. Even we ourselves very often fail to endure and follow through on exercise programs, diets, jobs, studies, etc. When the going gets tough, how often don't we quit!

As we run our race for LIFE we are buffeted and beaten by the sorrows, temptations, sins, grieves, sicknesses and everyday trials of this life we live. We can **ENDURE** only when our eyes of faith are **FOCUSED ON JESUS AND HIS WORD.** In verse 3 we read, **FOR CONSIDER HIM WHO ENDURED SUCH HOSTILITY FROM SINNERS AGAINST HIMSELF, LEST YOU BECOME WEARY AND DISCOURAGED IN YOUR SOULS.**

Our race for LIFE demands our full devotion, our full attention, our full and active participation or we too will become distracted, weighed down, weary, uncaring and drop out and never reach that goal of **EVERLASTING LIFE.** The word **ENDURE, PERSEVERE** means "holding out under stress, not slowing down or stopping for any reason." The race of faith is not some hundred-meter dash, but a life-long marathon. This is a race that involves exertion and great effort. It is an extremely difficult contest. Yes, we see the many Old Testament saints surrounding us who have reached the finish line but there are also the ones who failed. King Saul who started running so well and then found power to be more important and his pride destroyed him. Judas who started the race for LIFE with Christ as a disciple, but greed and covetous for the things of this life took over, weighed him down and entangled him and he never finished the race.

The Apostle Paul writes in Phil. 3:13,14: **FINALLY BROTHERS, I DO NOT CONSIDER MYSELF YET TO HAVE TAKEN HOLD OF IT. BUT ONE THING I DO: FORGETTING WHAT IS BEHIND AND STRAINING TOWARD WHAT IS AHEAD, I PRESS ON TOWARD THE GOAL TO WIN THE PRIZE FOR WHICH GOD HAS CALLED ME HEAVENWARD IN CHRIST JESUS. ALL OF US WHO ARE MATURE SHOULD TAKE SUCH A VIEW OF THINGS.**

The Lord Jesus has set you on this track of faith. He through the Holy Spirit has called you to be His own through faith, has moved you to give of yourself to Him, even as He gave Himself for all of us. Keep your eyes focused on Him. When our feet feel like lead, when we think we can not run another step, when our hearts are as heavy as our legs and our souls are ready to give up, then we need to especially keep Jesus and His Word before our eyes. What did Jesus have to **ENDURE?** What sorrows, pain and agony He experienced out of love for us. He triumphed over it all and He will give us the strength to persevere and reach that finish line. He promises us through the Apostle Paul, **I CAN DO ALL THINGS THROUGH CHRIST WHO STRENGTHENS ME.**

Jesus has gone where we are now going and where He is we will be. From Him comes not only the example of how to run our race, but the power for our faith to pick up the pace and lengthen our stride for the long run and when we fall, He picks us up---forgives us---and sets us back on the track.

Make use of that Word, come hear it regularly, read it daily at home, study it in Sunday School and Bible Class, partake of His Supper frequently, remember the blessings of your baptism, meditate on His great love for you that led Him to **ENDURE** the Crown of Thorns and the Whip. As we continue our Lenten worship may we continue to focus our eyes of faith upon Jesus who endured all of this hostility from people for us.

May the crown of thorns and the whip remind us of this important lesson on **ENDURANCE** in our race for **LIFE.**

Amen.