

Daily Bread with Brother Hwa-Chi (Not reviewed by the speaker, for personal use only)

Hebrews 12: 1-2

Brothers and sisters, peace be with you, this is Hwa-Chi. Thank the Lord, it's time to read the bible again. This week, we are going to read Hebrews Chapter 12, and today we will read verses 1-2.

Hebrews 11 is a great chapter on "faith," and its definition of faith is especially profound. Faith is the substance of things hoped for; it is connected to hope and is the power that realizes hope. Therefore, following the chapter on faith, chapter 12 unfolds as a chapter on hope. Personally, I believe that the author of Hebrews was very familiar with Paul's epistles and may very well have been Paul's close coworker, Barnabas. He understood that reaching hope requires enduring much suffering and that perseverance is necessary amid trials, just as Paul says in Romans 5:3-5, "And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope. Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us." One must endure various trials to reach hope.

The author simplifies Paul's argument slightly—perseverance produces hope—but he also adds some details. To attain hope, one must endure in two aspects.

1. Run the race set before us with endurance.
2. Endure the discipline of the Father.

If we endure in this way, we will bear the fruit of righteousness in our lives—this is subjective righteousness. When we first believed, we received Christ as our objective righteousness. Now, in the process of reaching hope, we grow in subjective righteousness, and Christ becomes our glorious hope.

The author of Hebrews uses words with great precision; his arguments are concise yet profound. The entire book is filled with golden verses. "Golden verses" are meant to be memorized and meditated upon, as they will help us throughout our

lives. The first two verses of chapter 12 are such golden verses. I hope the saints can first memorize them before listening to the daily Bible study, so that through these explanations, you may appreciate these two verses even more.

Verse 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,"

Chapter 11 lists many witnesses of faith, and at the end of the chapter, the author particularly emphasizes that these people bore a good testimony of faith. Many even paid the price with their lives and became martyrs. Previously, we mentioned that in Greek, the words for "witness" and "martyr" are the same. This means that every witness has the heart of a martyr. They bore a good testimony but did not receive what was promised because God had prepared something better. What God promised is a better heavenly homeland—a glorious city prepared for all the overcomers.

We, the saints of the last days, are not yet fully prepared. Without us, they cannot be made perfect. Therefore, at the beginning of chapter 12, the author states that we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses—these are the heroes of faith from both the Old and New Testaments listed in chapter 11. They surround us like a cloud; they are waiting for us to mature. They care about us and are constantly cheering us on.

The author uses the metaphor of a cloud, possibly for two reasons:

1. Like the pillar of cloud that led Israel in the wilderness—these witnesses are like a pillar of cloud, leading us. The path they walked in spiritual growth is the same path we must walk. Their examples serve as signposts for us.
2. A cloud surrounds us but does not pressure us—it is soft and light. This signifies that following the Lord is voluntary. We must accept the encouragement of these witnesses willingly. We must all receive the encouragement of these witnesses.

The author then tells us to remove two negative things—weights and sin, and to have the right attitude—run with endurance the race set before us. This verse is packed with deep meaning, which we will examine step by step.

1. Laying aside every weight

Running the race of faith is a lifelong journey. Athletes in a race remove all unnecessary weight to run faster and longer. The same is true for our spiritual journey—we must lay aside every weight. Weights are not necessarily sins, but they slow us down and shorten our endurance. Some weights come from negative emotions such as discouragement, disappointment, sorrow, anxiety, and depression. These emotions consume our strength. Often, they arise because we place our hope in people, events, or things. When these do not meet our expectations, negative emotions follow. To deal with this, we must first lay aside these emotions and then refocus our hope on Jesus Christ. The faithful Lord Jesus will never disappoint us.

Other weights come from worldly attractions—wealth, status, fame, and power. These are the pursuits of the world. If we chase after them, they will become burdens. Do not underestimate the weight of even a luxurious coat—in a long-distance race, a coat can become unbearable. Therefore, we must heed Paul's teaching in 1 Timothy 6: 6-8, "Now godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content."

For the Hebrew believers, their greatest burden may have been the Law and regulations they had kept for 1,500 years. These once defined Israel as God's Old Testament people but had now been replaced by Jesus Christ. The Old Testament was a shadow; the New Testament is the reality. Since the reality has come, why cling to the shadow? We, the New Testament believers should not look down on the Jews. How often do we cling to our own unbiblical religious traditions, following rules that restrict both ourselves and others, rather than walking in the newness of the Spirit and following God's leading freely?

2. Laying aside the sin that easily ensnares us

The word "sin" originally means missed the mark—failing to hit the target. Christ is our only goal; anything that deviates from Christ is sin. Sin not only hinders our progress but may even disqualify us from the race. In a competition, those who violate the rules are disqualified—this is a serious matter.

Sin easily entangles us, binding us like ropes, preventing us from following God freely. In the sovereign authority of God, He has given humans free will. Of course, people have the freedom to choose to sin, but the real problem is that once we sin, it becomes very difficult to have the freedom to not sin. The greatest difficulty of sin is that it entangles us, preventing us from freely following God.

In Greek, "sin" here is singular and has a definite article, meaning "the sin." What is this particular sin? I personally believe it is the sin of unbelief, the root of all sins. Earlier in Hebrews, the author solemnly warns against unbelief. In Hebrews 10:29, "Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace?" Unbelief insults the Holy Spirit and is an unforgivable sin.

Even believers can struggle with unbelief—not initial faith, but failing to trust God fully on our journey. This prevents us from completely surrendering to follow the Lord. The author sternly warns the backsliding saints in Hebrews 6:7-8, "For the earth which drinks in the rain that often comes upon it, and bears herbs useful for those by whom it is cultivated, receives blessing from God; but if it bears thorns and briers, it is rejected and near to being cursed, whose end is to be burned." A believer whose life only produces thorns and briers will suffer loss and miss out on rewards, though they will still be saved—"as through fire." They will not be overcomers.

3. Running with perseverance

The journey of faith requires lifelong perseverance, like a marathon. The heroes of faith in chapter 11 faced many trials that tested their faith. Trials must be endured, and through them, our faith becomes more precious than gold refined by fire.

As Paul states in Acts 14:22, "We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God." Therefore, we must have the right attitude— perseverance. It means not responding to unreasonable circumstances, not reacting to unfair treatment, and not retaliating against unlawful persecution. Instead, in faith, we draw on Christ's grace, which enables us to persevere to the end in the midst of suffering. The grace we draw upon will allow His nature to be built into us. We will then be able to display commendable qualities, becoming saints with character.

4. Character enables us to no longer focus on our circumstances, but to run the race that is set before us.

As Paul says in Philippians 3:13-14, "Forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus." Before us, we have a goal, which is the reward the Lord has called us to obtain. Therefore, we must forget what is behind and press forward to what lies ahead, running the race set before us. The word "race" in the KJV translates the original word most accurately. Our life is a race, and we must run, meaning we need to exert all our effort to reach the finish line as quickly as possible.

Since it is a race, who are we competing with? Saints, please remember that we are not competing with the brothers and sisters around us. We are fellow runners on this heavenly journey, and we are to encourage and help each other so that we can all move forward together. Certainly, we are not competing with those faith witnesses, for they have already completed their race and are now cheering us on, encouraging us, and rooting for us. Our true competition is with our own old self—the one that enjoys comfort and pleasure, the one that is easily tempted by the world to sin, the one that indulges the flesh and its desires. In the process of running the heavenly race, God allows various trials to come, precisely to put to death our old self, so that it will not entangle us and hinder our progress.

Since it is a race, there must be a racetrack, and interestingly, in this heavenly race, each person has their own track, which is personally tailored by God. How do we know what our track is? How should we run? In fact, this track is Christ. Do you

remember in John 14, Thomas did not know which way to go, and Jesus answered him in John 14:6, "I am the way." Christ is the way; Christ is our racetrack.

In our lives, whenever we encounter any situation, we always have a choice. If you choose Christ in every matter, you are walking on the right path. Therefore, every time you face a situation, first ask yourself: What would Jesus do? Then act according to that choice. Often, this is a difficult road—so difficult that it may even lead you to doubt. That is when you need verse 2.

Verse 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 phrase "looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith"—the Greek word for "looking" is composed of two words: apo (meaning "away from") and horao (meaning "to see"). Together, they mean "looking away from all else to fix one's gaze upon." That is, turning our eyes away from everything else and fixing them solely on Jesus. The world has too many things competing with Jesus for our attention, so we must deliberately look away from them and focus only on Jesus. One of the greatest difficulties for believers is looking at too many things they shouldn't, while failing to see what they truly should. May the Lord have mercy on us so that we may learn the lesson of looking only to Jesus, for He is the author and finisher of our faith.

Let's first consider how Jesus is the author of our faith. When someone preaches the gospel to us, and we hear it and find it good, we are willing to believe. Many think that this faith originates from themselves—but it does not. In reality, humans have no faith of their own. Rather, when the word of the gospel enters your heart, and you find it agreeable, it leaves a trace in your heart. That trace is the starting point of faith. As the gospel continues to work in your heart, faith begins to respond. At first, this response is so weak that you hardly notice it. Gradually, as it grows stronger, your mind becomes aware of it, and you start to seriously consider it.

Finally, you will decide to believe. That is the faith we recognize. But long before this, Christ's faith has already been working in your heart multiple times.

This is why Paul says in Galatians 2:20, "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me." Take note of the phrase which the KJV translates it as "live by the faith of the Son of God," which is more accurate—our faith comes from Christ. He is its source. That is why He is the author of our faith. Our responsibility is simply not to suppress or reject this faith. This is why the author of Hebrews gives such a stern warning to the unbelieving Jews in Hebrews 10:29, cautioning them that if they have felt conviction in their hearts yet harden themselves in unbelief, they are blaspheming the Holy Spirit and will face even greater judgment.

Jesus is also the finisher of our faith. The KJV translates this as "finisher," while the NIV translates it as "perfector." Together, they mean that He perfects and completes our faith, enabling us to reach the finish line. This is an immense gospel (good news) for all who are saved by grace. By our own strength, it is exceedingly difficult to reach the end. But as long as we continue looking to Jesus, this looking is mutual—on our part, we look to Him, and in response, He transmits His grace to us, giving us the strength to persist a little longer. This persistence leads to spiritual growth. As our spiritual life grows, we are able to look to Jesus more frequently and for longer periods, resulting in even greater grace being supplied. This, in turn, produces greater maturity in life, forming a positive cycle until our faith is perfected. At that point, we will have reached the finish line of our spiritual race.

The author then encourages us by using Christ's own experience as an example. "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 joy set before Him refers to Christ being exalted by the Father after completing His earthly ministry. This is confirmed in Philippians 2:9-11: "Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of

God the Father." Not only would Christ receive the highest glory, but He would also be seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

The process Christ endured is the same principle for believers who are willing to endure suffering in this life for the hope of future glory. However, what Christ endured was far beyond what any human could endure, and His attitude was far beyond what anyone could imagine. His incarnation was entirely for the purpose of redemption. That is why, at His birth, the wise men from the East worshiped Him and offered Him gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Myrrh symbolizes His death, and frankincense symbolizes His resurrection.

He was born for the purpose of dying. His entire life was a journey toward the cross. When He began His public ministry at the age of 30, He continually faced opposition, ridicule, and rejection. His earthly ministry culminated at the cross, where He was crucified and shed His precious blood for the sins of the world. The suffering of the cross was ordained by God, and Jesus endured it to fulfill the plan of salvation. The shame of the cross, however, was inflicted by man, and Jesus despised it.

Paul says in 1 Corinthians 1:18, "For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God." The cross is a mark of glory for believers. Christ endured the suffering of the cross, was resurrected, ascended into heaven, and is now seated at the right hand of God. Today, God has also assigned each believer their own cross to bear. Jesus Himself said in Matthew 10:38, "And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me."

When we choose to walk the way of the cross, others may misunderstand us and we may face shame and rejection from the world. But we must learn from Christ's example—to despise the shame. The criticisms and judgments of others mean nothing. What truly matters is God's evaluation. If God calls us to suffer and walk the way of the cross, we must endure, for it will result in eternal glory. Praise the Lord! Our hope is that on that day when we meet the Lord, He will say to us, "Well done, good and faithful servant; enter into the joy of your Lord."

Let us pray together: Lord, thank You! You have surrounded us with so many witnesses, like a great cloud, encouraging us to run the race set before us. Help us to lay aside every weight and to put away the sin that so easily ensnares us. In our race, when we grow weary and discouraged, let us once again look to Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith. He is the source of our faith, and He enables us to complete this journey of faith and reach the glorious finish line. Lord, thank You for placing this glorious hope before us to encourage us in our daily lives. Thank You for giving me spiritual companions in the church, so that together we can run this heavenly race. Bless the church I belong to. We pray in the Holy Name of Jesus Christ.