

Introduction:

- IE. One of the biggest boxing matches of the twentieth century took place on November 25, 1980, at the Superdome in New Orleans, Louisiana. It was a rematch between Sugar Ray Leonard and Roberto Duran. Duran had won the previous fight and was the favorite the second time around. He had a record of 72 wins and just one loss and he had won his last forty-one fights. That is some winning streak. The rematch was a close fight. Only a point or two separated the two fighters on the judges' scorecards. But then something unthinkable happened in the eighth round that no one expected. Roberto Duran turned to the referee and spoke two words: "No mas." "No more." He quit. He wasn't injured. He wasn't cut. He was frustrated and he'd had enough. Here is a fighter who was one of the best to ever step into the ring. He won a total of 103 fights, but when anyone mentions his name today, the first thing that comes to mind is "no mas." People remember the day he quit. Don't let people remember you for quitting.
- The book of Hebrews was written to a church that was getting old and tired. It was settling into the world and losing its mandate for purity and its mission to reach the lost. It was drifting and losing focus. It was almost to the place of being lifeless.
 - This is why the writer says in Hebrews 12:12 strengthen your hands that hang down and your weak knees.
 - They were failing to run the race they had started.
- Listen to this thread in the book of Hebrews:
 - Pay close attention so that you do not drift. How will you escape if you neglect so great a salvation? Heb 2:1-3 People are drifting, neglecting, lazy and careless.
 - Heb 3:12-13 Be careful that your hearts are not evil, unbelieving and turning away from the living God. Warn each other not be hard hearted.
 - Hebrews 5:12 You should be teaching others but you still need milk...grow up! You made a profession of faith why are you still at the starting line???
 - Heb 12:12-13 strengthen your tired hands and weak knees so that those who are weak will not fall but become strong.
 - All through the book the writer has laid out how weak they are. He has given us the list of heroes of the faith to inspire us. Their lives are to be a living testimony to us! And it is from these testimonies that we are commanded to get back in the race and RUN!!!
- Hebrews 11:39-12:4
 - IE. Washing machine agitator—the better the agitator the cleaner the clothes. This message is to serve as an agitator for your faith.

I. Strip Off Every Weight

- A. That is a command and it does not surprise us when we consider all the Hebrew writer has warned us of. He has given us the entire book with its warning and

exhortations so that we get into the race we started. Our faith is critical to this race and to finishing.

1. The main point of our text is to RUN!!! Don't stroll, meander, wonder around... Run!
 2. All through the book we hear: endure, persevere, run, fight, be alert, don't drift, don't neglect, don't take this great salvation for granted.
 3. Fight the fight of faith is all because of Christ's glorious death and resurrection. Let your faith stand out like the saints of Hebrews 11 did.
- B. Everything in the book supports us in running the race we have entered and finishing!
1. The truths about Christ are to motivate and inspire us to continue.
 2. Better covenant, better priest, better blood, better sacrifice, etc.
- C. And in 12:1 we are commanded to strip off every weight that slows us down and every sin that trips us up.
1. Strip off the sin that trips us up.
 - a) We know what sin is. The Hebrew writer is saying, "Stop it!" When something is revealed as sin we are to be done with it. Drop it for it will hinder your ability to win this race.
 - b) Sin is easily identifiable by the Word and by the Spirit. Both are exposed by Holy Spirit conviction. He is trying to help us!
 2. Strip off the weights that slow us down. Weights means "burden, impediment, encumbrance." He is not talking about sin in this phrase but the things that will hinder or slow us down on the race. Not everything in life that opposes God is sin. Some things are good but when taken in excess they become a hinderance.
 - a) Understanding this shows us that the fight of faith – the race of the Christian life – is not fought well or run well by asking, "What is wrong with this or that?" but instead by asking, "Is it in the way of great faith and greater love and greater self-control?"
 - b) We are not to ask, "Is it a sin?" but, "Does it help me run?"
 - c) Don't ask what is wrong about your music, your movies, your parties, your habits: Ask: "Does it help me run the race? Does it help me live for Jesus?"
 - d) Heb 12:1 is a command to look at your life! To think hard about what you are doing... and get ruthless about what stays and what goes.
 - e) We have to look at our own lives. We can't be passive and say it does not apply to me. If you do you will drift. You can't be aggressive or you will be impatient with others and become judgmental. It has to be received as your own personal responsibility, do something about it.
 3. Removing encumbrances is about running the race well and to finishing with excellence.

II. Run With Endurance! Why?

- A. We run with endurance because we want to win. The cost is too high to lose! So what motivates us? The answer to that question is what the rest of this text is about.
- B. I run because I am surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses...witnessing to the life of faith. In other words, "If they can do it so can I!"
1. Verse 1 starts with "therefore" or because of Hebrews 11, I am face to face with the testimonies of Able, Enoch, Noah, Moses, Sarah, Rahab, Gideon...these all lived and died in the faith! I run because they demonstrated how to do it and not quit inspire of incredible odds.
 2. "Witness" can be the act of seeing or the act of telling. In our case since we have read about the heroes so we are hearing their testimony. This word witness is used 5 times in Hebrews 11 (verses: 2, 4 [twice], 5, 29). These have run the race and now they stand as a testimony to us that we can run it too!
 3. *"Although Abel is long dead, he still speaks to us by his example of faith."* (Heb 11:4 NLT) By faith, you can finish. You can lay the weights down and the sins.
- C. I run because they are waiting for me. Have you ever been really hungry but you have to wait for your company/family to arrive before you can eat. You can smell it, taste it, see it but you can't have it until they arrive!
1. That is what 11:39 and 40 are saying. In other words, God's purpose is that all his people – all the redeemed – be gathered in before any of them enjoys the fullness of his promise. His purpose is that we all come into the fullness of our inheritance together. We all await our resurrected bodies!
 2. Our lives count! To God, and to them! History is waiting for us to finish!
- D. I run because I see Jesus! *"We do this by keeping our eyes on Jesus, the champion who initiates and perfects our faith. Because of the joy awaiting him, he endured the cross, disregarding its shame. Now he is seated in the place of honor beside God's throne."* (Hebrews 12:2, NLT)
1. We run with endurance because we keep our eyes on Jesus! Because He endured the cross, scorned its shame, and obtained the seat of honor.
 2. Therefore, I can endure, I can overcome the shame, and in the win be honored by God!
 3. Faith lays hold of Jesus for help! Just as Jesus has laid hold of our heart for faith. He is the author and finisher of our faith. *"May he produce in you, through the power of Jesus Christ, every good thing that is pleasing to him. All glory to him forever and ever! Amen."* (Hebrews 13:21, NLT) He wants us to win, has equipped us to win and fights for us to win!
 4. Don't quit!!!

III. Time To Strip Down

- A. When I ran track in high school, the season always began in the spring. Late Feb early March we would start training. You had to wear sweats to keep from freezing. It was usually cold and very damp outside. When it came to time for a meet and it was your event the coach would say, "Time to get ready, strip down." That meant to remove your sweats, off with the ankle weights, on with the spikes. Only what you need to run. And for the next 60 seconds it was you, the wind and the win!
- B. How to strip down.
1. Take a sheet of paper and make two columns
 - a) A column for the sins that are entangling you (the sins trip you up).
 - b) A column for the weights (the weights slow you down).
 2. Begin to list the things that are tripping you up and the things that are encumbering you from running the race. Is it in the way of faith? Is it helping me to run?
 3. Start focusing on removing sins and changing out what hinders your faith and faith walk. Be ruthless because it is for the King! It is for eternity! It is for others!

Conclusion:

- You were meant to be history makers in the realm of faith. Others are right now looking to you.
- Will your life be a testimony...will it testify of faith to others?
- Faith is a race...are you running to win?