

TRANSFORMED LIFE

Hebrews 12:1-2

Welcome everyone! He is Risen!

What a wonderful blessing to be able to worship our Risen Savior and Lord together this year. I know for myself that I don't take for granted the gathered body for Lord's Day worship anymore. I am especially thankful that we can gather inside again. Lots of things to be grateful for. So thankful that we have this space that is ours and we could be flexible during the restrictions last year. Also thankful for all of you who have continued with us as a church family and not given up on us.

Today's theme will be centered around the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Focusing on the death and Resurrection of Christ is like a multi-faceted jewel, it shines and sparkles with so many angles. Today we will be focusing on how Christ's Resurrection transforms our life.

The central Christian belief is that Christ's death has somehow put us right with God and given us a fresh start... in Christ a new kind of man appeared: and the new kind of life which began in Him is to be put into us.
– **C.S. Lewis**

We won't be talking as much about the mechanics of how Christ's death accomplishes that, but that it actually works in giving us a new and transformed life; His life, a God-life.

Hebrews 12:1-2

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

Life in Community

Therefore... great cloud of witnesses... (v.1)

Examples and Encouragement

And what more shall I say? For time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets – who through faith conquered kingdoms, enforced justice, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, were made strong out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight. Women received back their dead by resurrection. Some were tortured, refusing to accept release, so that they might rise again to a better life. Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were killed with the sword. They went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute,

afflicted, mistreated – of whom the world was not worthy – wandering about in deserts and mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth. And all these, though commended through their faith, did not receive what was promised, since God had provided something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect.

– Hebrews 11:32-40

They were part of the Covenant community of God, and their faith commended them to God.

The Writer of Hebrews almost seems to be blithely run through this list of people and accomplishments, yet this is not the case. These stories were so well known and spoken of in the Jewish/God-fearing communities that just calling attention to these names brings back memories of their stories, their struggles, their successes, their flaws.

Do we as a church know the stories of our family in the Bible? Do we read and pass on the legacies of our faith kin to ourselves and our children? The examples given to us are incredibly important for giving us encouragement to run this race God has set our feet upon.

Who in your life is a legacy of Christ-like endurance and faith, whom the world is not worthy of?

The Church family is meant to be a multi-generational community, with families all together living life in community, sharing all things with each other, and learning from the older wiser among us. One thing that we have had in the past as a church is the presence of the wise hairs. We don't have many of those right now, and it is something which I pray God brings into our church family again.

They were part of the Covenant community of God, yet they were incomplete, lacking the fullness of what a redeemed community is: which is in the New Covenant of Christ.

Those who have gone before us are not complete without us. We have a transformed purpose, which is to bring to greater fullness the Redeemed of the LORD.

This is only possible through the death and resurrection of Christ who brings together all His elect under His wing and unites us all together in Him!

We are part of the greatest movement and community in the history of the cosmos! Nothing else comes close to the kind of divine purpose and glory that comes from being in the church of God.

...of whom the world was not worthy. – Hebrews 11:38

Through Christ, we are saved into a transformed community. One that is full of justified sinners, who all seek to live for God's glory, who all fail, yet who all have the Spirit to pick us up and keep us running the race. We have a transformed community whose legacy will last for eternity, unlike the legacy of the world which will be burned up with fire. We have a transformed community, one whose call to one another is to keep the memories alive of those who have gone before us so that we might be inspired to live for Christ today.

How is your life being lived to be an encouragement to others? What legacy are you setting for those around you?

Transformed Desires

In light of meditating on those who have gone before us, the Writer gives the exhortation not to let the lessons of those before us go unheeded, but use them to run our Christian race with endurance. The Writer identifies two things which we ought to lay aside in our lives which threaten to trip us up or smother us in the race: weight and sin.

Spiritual Weights

Why is the Writer using this imagery to describe how to run this race? To give a picture of a person who is choosing to hold on to a large weight. The Writer is strongly emphasizing the person's decision to either hold on to the weight, or to put it down.

What weighs us down in our lives?

- Past sin
- Shame from others
- Past failures
- Worries of the world
- Relational strife and troubles
- Physical health + mental health
- Sin done unto us
- Seeing others not follow or love Christ

Each of these things are things which threaten to weigh us down so much that we stop running the race. In each of these we are tempted to become embittered toward God or others, so discouraged that we quit, or so infatuated with the world that our love cools and we stop loving Christ.

How are we to lay aside these burdens? We are called to give them to Christ and let Him bear the weight that we so often feel!

Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.

– Matthew 11:28-30

...Casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you... **– 1 Peter 5:7**

When we feel the weight of life press down upon us, let us take these burdens to Jesus so that He, with His strong shoulders, take those burdens upon Himself. His resurrection guarantees that He has the strength to take on our worry and cares, and lift them up that we might be free to continue running this race, bringing honor and glory to His name!

Up this way, therefore, did burdened Christian run; but not without great difficulty, because of the load on his back. He ran thus till he came at a place somewhat ascending; and upon that place stood a Cross, and a little below, in the bottom, a sepulchre. So I saw in my dream, that just as Christian came up to the cross, his burden loosed from off his shoulders, and fell from off his back, and began to tumble; and so continued to do till it came to the mouth of the sepulchre, where it fell in, and I saw it no more. Then was Christian glad and lightened, and said, with a joyful heart, He has given me rest by his sorrow, And life by his death. Then he stood still awhile to look and wonder; for it was very surprising to him, that the sight of the cross should thus ease him of his burden. He looked therefore, and looked again, even till the springs that were in his head sent the waters down his cheeks.

– Pilgrim's Progress

Striving Against Sin

The second exhortation that the Writer gives to us in light of Christ's death and resurrection is to strive against sin, which he says, clings so closely. Other translations say which easily entangles us. We all know the slippery slope of sin in our lives. Often gross moral failure is simply a result of a complacency with the smaller sins in our lives which harden our consciences until we can't feel the sting of conviction any longer.

Story of how fleas destroyed our dog Dickens...when we were not diligent to consistently clean the fleas off of him, they came back swiftly and with a vengeance. Our dog was miserable, biting himself, scratching, ripping out hair, and drawing blood. This is what sin does to us when we are not diligent to let the Spirit of God bring conviction in our lives, we start to devour ourselves until there is nothing left of us

What is the weapon of our warfare? The Spirit of God, the Word of God, the Church of God.

What is the vision that keeps us going? The person of Jesus Christ. He alone is sufficient to motivate us to live more fully for His own glory. He alone is worthy of our attention and goals in life. If Jesus did not come, live, die, and rise again, then it is only best to live for yourself and your pleasures and comfort. But if Jesus really did live, die, and rise again, then it means that all of cosmic and personal history is to be found in His story.

It is undeniable that Jesus actually lived, was crucified, buried, and rose again. The question is really what does it mean?

Life in Christ

The way that we get this new life, the way that we continually run this race with endurance is by keeping our gaze on Jesus. When we do that what do we see?

Resurrection

Pioneer of new life.

This is what is meant by Jesus being the founder of our Faith. It is the idea of a pioneer who has gone before, breaking up the way, finding the safe paths so that we might follow it. He rose from the dead first showing us

the safe way to live, which is by faith in His death and resurrection on our behalf. The safe way for our eternal salvation is by trusting in Christ's resurrection. The safe way for living our life here and now is by letting this new eternal life shine through our hearts and minds, leaking out into our lives

Redemption

Completer of transformation.

This is what is meant by Jesus being the perfecter of our faith. He Himself is perfect, and He gives Himself to us, His own righteousness, so that we are made perfect in God's sight. He is also the One who completes this act of transformation

*And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ. – **Philippians 1:6***

*...Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure. – **Philippians 2:12-13***

Ruling

Transformer of our sorrows to joy. Our mourning to shouts of praise. Our ashes for beauty.

What we see in our text is a beautiful description of why Jesus went to the cross; for joy. What was the joy that Jesus had fixed in His mind as He endured the worst sufferings anyone has ever endured?

The joy of seeing all of His elect redeemed through His death, and given new life, a fresh start, through His resurrection. To know that His death would actually accomplish the goal to save all of His people from their sin is cause for joy!

The joy of bringing glory to the Father by His obedience and His sacrifice. Jesus' life shows us that bringing glory to the Father brings joy. Obedience to God brings joy.

The joy of uniting all of His people together so that we are all truly One, without division, or competition, or strife. Unity is always cause for rejoicing, so for Christ to accomplish what no other human has ever accomplished in the history of mankind, the true unity of all nations and tongues, is yet another cause for joy!

The joy of renewing all things in Him.

*Behold, I am making all things new. – **Revelation 21:5***

How did He do this?

*...What is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places... – **Ephesians 1:19-20***

What does the Lord transform?

The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me to bring good news to the poor; he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound; to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn; to grant to those who mourn in Zion— to give them a beautiful headdress instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the garment of praise instead of a faint spirit...
– **Isaiah 61:1-3**

He transforms our broken hearts into new hearts full of love.

He transforms our spiritual poverty into spiritual riches in His riches.

He transforms our captivity to sin into freedom in the Spirit.

He transforms our fear of the Lord's vengeance into the Lord's favor.

He transforms our hurts into comforts.

He transforms our weeping into shouts of praise.

He transforms our spiritual ugliness into true beauty.

He transforms our weakness and fainting into strength and dancing!

Today, we have the opportunity to respond to this wonderful message of a transformed life through faith in the Resurrected Son of God. When we turn to Jesus in faith, seeking His forgiveness for our sins, and to be reconciled with God Almighty, He quickly grants that to us in ever increasing measure. May we today come to Jesus to see our lives, our joy, our hope, and our eternity transformed by His life, death, and resurrection to the glory of God alone.

Closing Prayer

O Lord; we marvel that You should become incarnate, be crucified, dead, and buried. The tomb calls forth our wonder, because it is empty and You are risen! May we die with You that we may rise to new life, for we desire to be dead and buried to sin, our selfishness, and the world. O Lord, there is much about us that is sick still – crucify it; there is much that is worldly in us still – kill it. Let us count our old lives as dead because of crucifixion, and never feed it as a living thing. Grant us to stand with our Savior, to be content to be rejected, to be willing to take up unpopular truths, and to hold fast His teachings until our death. Strengthen us for the battles ahead, give us courage for all our trials, and grace for all our joys. Help us to be holy, happy people, free from sinful desires. Grant us more and more of Your resurrection life: may it rule over us, may we walk in it's power, and be strengthened through it's influence. Amen.