

Sermon Series
The Superiority of Jesus Christ
July 10, 2022

Title: Wrestle On!

Subject: Christian Struggle, Sanctification, Regeneration, Sin, the World, the Devil, the Flesh, The Spirit, Encouragement, Discouragement, Endure, Weariness, Hostility, Jesus Christ, Hebrew Christians

Theme Text: Hebrews 12:3-4 (ESV) ³ Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted. ⁴ In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood.

Theme Illustration: In the first four verses of Hebrews chapter 12, the Holy Spirit is warning wavering Hebrew Christians against apostasy that the enemies of Christ are encouraging through various forms of persecution. In verses one and two, the enemies are largely internal while in our text the enemies of Christ are using external pressures and intimidation to encourage apostasy, retreat, and surrender from professing Christians. The word struggle signifies a wrestling match or a gladiatorial contest. Our text is a soft warning that surrender to these enemies is not an option for believers, even though they are weary at the constant opposition. They and we are to contemplate that our struggle against sin, that is apostasy, might include our death. The sin mentioned in verse four is the sin of apostasy.

There are places in the world where this possibility remains today. There is tribulation going on, the saints are being oppressed, jailed, and martyred. Victory in this struggle may only be won by looking to Jesus, Hebrews 12:2 and in our text, by considering Jesus by and in faith.

Read: Hebrews 12:3-4

Introduction: The Holy Spirit now moves us from the metaphor of a race to the metaphor of a wrestling match. We move from the picture of a marathon

to the picture of gladiatorial combat. Do we realize from the moment we came to Christ, we were involved in a gladiatorial contest, **Ephesians 6:12 (ESV)** ¹² **For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. These pictures are taken from the Olympics or at that time the Grecian games.**

In the race, we were exhorted to lay aside every weight. In the contest, we are to endure against hostile actions of our antagonist. The weight we were instructed to lay aside proceeds from within us, while in our text, the hindrances or antagonists are external. In the former, our match was against the flesh, while in today's case it is the persecutions of the world.

We were instructed to lay aside the sin which drags us down. Today we're told that unless we have struggled to the point of death, we must struggle on. If need be, we must be willing to become a martyr.

Transition: We have in our text, a threefold exhortation. The first exhortation warns us not to forget the example of our Savior. In both cases. First, in verses one and two and now in verses three and four. The focus is to be upon the Savior. We are to:

1. Consider Christ: Hebrews 12:3-4 (ESV) ³ **Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted.** ⁴ In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood.

The more we are conformed to Christ, and more closely follow Him, the greater will be the hostility of the unbelieving person against us. They will say and do all they can to discourage, hinder, provoke, and oppose us. This should explain some of the vitriol we see today. This is not a Christian persecution complex. This is the reality of thousands of years of history and experience of God's saints. The tactics of our opponent are to discourage and tempt us to compromise. Our ways will condemn theirs, our ways will

be a perpetual rebuke to them. To them, we carry about us the odor of death, **2 Corinthians 2:15-16 (ESV)** ¹⁵ **For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing,** ¹⁶ **to one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life. Who is sufficient for these things?** Consider this, to the Pharisees, Christ stunk to high heaven. The principle is that righteousness is an offense to the unrighteous. This is also true within the church. The tares will always hate the wheat. Error will always hate the truth. We are, therefore, called to consider Christ, who endured such hatred and yet continued doing the Father's will.

What the Holy Spirit is attempting to impress upon us is that a key part of our battling in this gladiatorial contest is our knowledge of and meditation on the experiences of our Lord Jesus Christ. We grow faint in our struggle when we feel we are alone. The biblical record of His unequalled temptations, trials, perseverance, and His victory is to be a primary source of comfort, encouragement, and inspiration to the saints.

This is why a constant and intimate knowledge of His ways, and a faith-filled study of the record of His life and words is vital. May we embrace Paul's exhortation, **Philippians 3:8 (ESV)** ⁸ **Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ.**

Transition: The second exhortation is that given the intensity of the struggle:

2. Consider Faith: Hebrews 12:3-4 (ESV) ³ Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, **so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted.** ⁴ In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood.

This is where the importance of faith enters in. We are being cautioned against giving in to quitting, which will prevent us from discharging the duty

mentioned in Hebrews 12:1-3. We are being warned not to give up our Christian profession. If we become faint or lightheaded, we will fail to consider Christ. This is an effect of strong and long-lasting opposition and the result is discouragement.

Our Lord was constantly opposed by word and action. He was oppressed by His own people. His opposition began at His birth, there was no room for Him at the Inn. It continued after His birth when Herod sought to kill Him. In this messianic Psalm, Jesus is speaking through the psalmist saying, **Psalm 88:15-18 (ESV)** ¹⁵ **Afflicted and close to death from my youth up, I suffer your terrors; I am helpless.** ¹⁶ **Your wrath has swept over me; your dreadful assaults destroy me.** ¹⁷ **They surround me like a flood all day long; they close in on me together.** ¹⁸ **You have caused my beloved and my friend to shun me; my companions have become darkness.**

Consider Jesus who was dismissed as a prophet, mocked as a king, and treated with disdain and contempt as Messiah. Savior. He was accused of deceiving (John 7:12) and perverting the people, (Luke 23:14). He was accused of casting out demons by the prince of demons. When He performed acts of mercy on the Sabbath day, He was charged with breaking the law, (Mark 3:2). He was branded as a glutton and a wine addict. He was accused of plotting against Caesar against what was rightfully His, (Matthew 22:21)

Though He is and was God incarnate, He was spat upon, given a crown of thorns, His kingship was mocked with a purple robe while His enemies mocked Him by bowing before Him. They tore His back with flogging. The cry of the Savior's recorded in **Psalm 129:3 (ESV)** ³ **The plowers plowed upon my back; they made long their furrows."** They condemned Him to a criminal's death between two thieves to dishonor Him further.

Nevertheless, He did not turn from His duty while exclaiming this through the psalmist, **Psalm 69:20-21 (ESV)** ²⁰ **Reproaches have broken my heart, so that I am in despair. I looked for pity, but there was none, and for comforters, but I found none.** ²¹ **They gave me poison for food, and for my thirst they gave me sour wine to drink.**

He refused to flee from His enemies. Can we not see that considering Christ is a God-appointed means of grace to strengthen us in our struggle? The word weary means exhausted. Exhaustion brings a strong desire to quit. We must remember the Lord's exhortation to the church at Ephesus, **Revelation 2:3 (ESV)** ³ **I know you are enduring patiently and bearing up for my name's sake, and you have not grown weary.**

Throughout church history, God permitted fierce opposition to break out against His people to test the reality and strength of attachment to Christ. This is the sifting of the wheat and the tares. This is why Peter urges us in **1 Peter 4:1 (ESV)** ¹ **Since therefore Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves with the same way of thinking, for whoever has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin.**

What is the believer called to do to prevent this faint-heartedness? Everything in our lives calls for faith. It is the daily exercise of faith that steadies our hearts and soul. Faith calls us to agree with **Romans 8:18 (ESV)** ¹⁸ **For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.** And given the object of our faith, Jesus Christ, we are to agree with **2 Corinthians 4:17 (ESV)** ¹⁷ **For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison...**

Transition: In our last application we are to:

3. Consider the Alternative: Hebrews 12:3-4 (ESV) ³ Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted. ⁴ **In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood.**

The immediate audience of this text is the persecuted, suffering Hebrew Christians. The Hebrew Saints were greatly oppressed by their unbelieving brothers among the Jews. The Holy Spirit is reminding the righteous remnant and us that our opposition is not yet as severe as it could be. The

reasoning is thusly, if your heart faints at these less severe trials, imagine the difficulty of maintaining our faith and profession when and if they or we face martyrdom. It is helpful for us to not overlook the word **yet** in verse four. The word yet is not a promise, but an indication that martyrdom is a definite possibility for them under their present circumstances and may be for us as we face the future.

The combatant in verse four is sin. It is the sin of apostasy that must be overcome. The struggle is in the believer's heart between grace and sin, the flesh and the spirit, Galatians 5:17. Sin seeks to quench faith and kill obedience. There is no place in the believer's life with a truce with sin. The sin that the Hebrew Christians were striving against was the sin of apostasy. Persecution throughout history has been the vehicle the world has used to entice believers to apostatize.

Conclusion: The same tactics are used by the opponents of Christ today. It may not result in a public renunciation of Christ, but the enemies of Christ have achieved de facto renunciations by intimidating, professing believers to quit the race and struggle by simply retreating from the battlefield. That battlefield is our heart and mind.

The enemies of Christ have indeed throughout the church age sown the seeds of martyrdom. As a Christian, which type of martyrdom presents the greatest challenge? The martyrdom of our body? Or the martyrdom of our faith? Maintaining our faith while martyred promises a reward, **Revelation 20:4 (ESV)** ⁴ **Then I saw thrones, and seated on them were those to whom the authority to judge was committed. Also I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus and for the word of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years.** While the death of faith results in eternal death. I believe the choice is clear.