



**"The bike race of faith: Riding Together in Hebrews 12:1-29
15/10/23 All Services
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Today we open our hearts to the wisdom found in Hebrews, chapter 12, about Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith.

Hebrews 12:1-2 says, "Therefore, since we are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith".

These verses remind us that Jesus is not just our example in the race of faith; He is the pioneer and finisher of our faith. He didn't merely run ahead of us, showing us how to run the race. He ran it for us, as our substitute. He blazed the trail. He obeyed perfectly, accepted God's plan, and gave His life for our salvation. His perfect obedience means that we are completely accepted by him. Our faith comes from grace. It is not our finished work, based on our performance. It is faith that comes from understanding the finished work of Christ. In this way Jesus ran the perfect race, and by His wounds, we are healed.

It is because Jesus is superior, Jesus is best, Jesus is the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, that we enter the race.

The writer of Hebrews uses the analogy of a race to describe the Christian journey. I will take the liberty of calling this journey a bike race, as riding bikes has been a passion of my past. Nicki and I watch the Tour de France every year. We love it. Ironically, as my mind links ideas and moments in time.... On Friday we joined with the Bible Society to meet to continue the heart for Bibles to be available for the entire world. They are promoting "Bike for Bibles" as a great cause to ride for life that can be eternal. We did one from Mittagong to Canberra 20 years ago....do you remember? Let's now look forward.....

Imagine a great bike race stretching out before us, but ours is a race of faith. Each one of us is a rider on our own bike, unique and distinct. However just as in a bike race, we are not alone in our journey of faith. We ride together in a peloton (literally a "ball"). As the body of believers God has called us to belong to, we journey together, providing mutual support and encouragement to persevere along the way. For protection make sure you put on your helmet, but in the journey of faith, ours is the helmet of salvation, because without this protection, the race can't begin.

1) Leading the peloton

For those who don't understand this term, a peloton in a road bicycle race, is the main group or pack of riders. Riders in a group save energy by riding close, known as drafting or slipstreaming, and particularly behind other riders. As we pedal through the ups and downs of life, there are times when we find ourselves at the front of the peloton, setting the pace and leading the way. These are the moments when our faith is strong, and we are in a position to help others. We must embrace these opportunities to serve and be a blessing. Remember back in Hebrews 10, we are called to love and to undertake good deeds as a believer. Together, in unity, we glorify God, making Jesus known, as we love and serve together.

Verse 15 is a warning against a "bitter root growing up to cause trouble and defile many". This bitter root is selfishness, resentment, unforgiveness, even superiority. When we allow bitterness and unforgiveness to take root in our heart, it poisons not only our own faith but also the faith of those around us. We need to keep our eyes on the truth of our victory. From Philippians 3:14 "I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus". As we press on, we are called to be agents of the fruits of the Spirit; love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. (Galatians 5: 22). When we serve like this, we reflect a faith that is strong.

2) Lagging Behind

Yet there are also times when we lag behind, when the road becomes steep, and the winds are fierce. In these moments we might even slip back from the peloton. We need the support of someone to shield us from the relentless wind, to encourage us to persevere, and not give up on the journey. This is what the writer is encouraging the Hebrews to do throughout chapter 12. Do you know it is five years this week since my heart attack ... that was a significant lag for me. Thank you for your encouragement to persevere. Using the analogy of the bike race, at these times we need to go back and oil the gears and wheel chains. We need to go back to the basics of God's love for us and our trust in His goodness.

3) Riding Uphill

Sometimes when our hardships test our faith, we can question God. We doubt His goodness. It is like riding uphill. At these times we are encouraged to remember that God is a promise keeper. He has been with His people throughout the Old Testament and He is still trustworthy today. It is in these uphill battles when we persevere that our faith grows stronger. James 1:2-4 reminds us, "Count it all joy when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness".

Hebrews 12:3 challenges us to persevere through hardship, so that "you will not grow weary and lose heart". Hardships are not trivial or insignificant. But if they are reframed as refining our faith rather than thinking of them as discouraging. Growing pains are necessary as we are transformed to be more like Christ.

Notice how the author of Hebrews calls the readers to "own" their perseverance. It's not the case that some people just naturally persevere, and others randomly end up losing their faith. God keeps us close as we choose to do everything we can to endure. We don't choose our circumstances. We choose how we respond to our circumstances. It is not a one-day race of life. We are always in training facing every circumstance according to God's purposes and plans for each of us.

This also means we need to lay aside things that slow us down or trip us up. It is our active choice to be holy because "without holiness, no-one will see the Lord" [verse 14.]

When we persevere, when we fix our eyes on Jesus, we change our perspective, so we will not "grow weary and lose heart" [verse 3.]

4) Cruising Downhill

Other times we ride downhill, enjoying moments of ease and rest. These are the times we appreciate the blessings given to us by God and are thankful to Him with joyful hearts. It is important to use these moments of peace to refresh our spirit and draw closer to God. Even in these moments, we need to remember the race is not over. We need to always be vigilant and prepared, in awe and respect of our great God, who tells us the race is not over until He returns.

Verses 22 and 23 state this incredible claim: "But you have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, to the church of the firstborn. You have come to God."

In the Old Covenant, the message of Mount Sinai was "Keep out! This is the dwelling place of the One, powerful God; and you, mere creatures, are not God." It is the same God, yesterday, today and forever. This reverence and awe of God's power and holiness, which God requires, is now located within a relationship of God's love and grace. The same God, who stayed faithful to His people throughout the Old Testament, is faithful in bringing the New Covenant. Faith is not just about personal salvation but about being part of an "unshakable Kingdom" [verse 28.]

The writer contrasts Mt Sinai with Mt Zion. Rather than "Keep out!" we are welcomed in.

We have open access to this powerful God, where we are welcomed into His presence.

The two mountains come together. In prestigious race climbs, the double mountain climb in a day tests the best rider. Mt Sinai, necessary as a prelude to Mt Zion.

Christ has done the climb; victory is His and won for us.

The now very popular e-bike is an example that it is through the work of Christ, not our own, that we share the final victory.

Here in Hebrews, we have a picture of joy, a picture of blessing in being God's firstborn. Here, we have a picture of inclusion in which our names are written in heaven, a picture of us being judged as righteous and perfect in the eyes of God. The divine power that is greater than any other powers and principalities, that divine power is now made approachable. We are welcomed by God because we have "Jesus the mediator of a new covenant by His sprinkled blood" [verse 24.] Our awe and reverence for God should lead us to worship and adore Him, the One who sustains us in the race.

5) Riding on the Flat

Finally, there are the moments when we ride on the flat, enjoying the beauty of the scenery around us. We have time to look around, notice those who are in the race with us, and build God's Kingdom using the gifts He has given us. How can I serve? How can I be a blessing to others? How can I share the love of God with my church community and then out into Kiama and beyond? This is the essence of Christian community today. Just as riders in a peloton work together, we are called to "live in peace" [verse 14], by showing grace and humility towards others. When we live this way, we are looking outward. Go with me on this ... we breathe out prayerfully, connecting as we journey the cycles of life together, being transformed as we persevere and stay in the race of faith.

Be warned against looking inward to all the tiny little kingdoms that we try to create for ourselves. Watch out for the bumps/potholes on the road that can so easily knock you off course. In Europe, it is the cobblestones, built in the first century. Maybe in my analogy, this could represent tradition and fixed thinking. In these kingdoms, we are tempted to place our faith in created things that just won't last, things like a successful job, good health, material possessions, other people's good opinion of us, successful children, you name it. All of these are good things, but they all have a shaky existence. That's why Jesus said, "Seek first the Kingdom of God, and all these things will be added to you." Only God's kingdom will last, with Jesus as our sure foundation. Though the world may shake, we serve an unshakeable Kingdom.

The writer of Hebrews gives us the encouragement that we are not to depend on earthly things but on those things that are spiritual, heavenly things! The Kingdom we are receiving comes from Jesus Christ. This is the unshakable kingdom, a spiritual kingdom, that cannot be taken from us! The writer wants us to understand that our

confidence must be in God and Him alone! Jesus is our confidence! This Kingdom is unbeatable, unmovable, unstoppable, unconquerable, and unshakable, and it has been given to us! Let us not be moved by the things we see happening on the earth, for "we are receiving a Kingdom which cannot be shaken" (Hebrews 12:28).

Isaiah 40:1 says "But those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will "ride bikes" and not grow weary; they will walk and not be faint".

James 1:12 says "Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial because, having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him".

So stay on your bike, keep going, persevere, grow in love and trust of the peloton and keep your eyes fixed on the unshakable Kingdom of God.

Rod will bring us the conclusion of our series from Hebrews next week. Not on the road, not able to swim across to us but in the triathlon of the of our race, from Lord Howe, we will cry!
He is my King!