

**Reasons to persist in faith**

- *The blood of Jesus*
- *The priesthood of Jesus*
- *The prayers of Jesus*
- *The promised reward*

Let us remember where we are in the letter to the Hebrews. Our writer has given us many reasons for believing that we are able to persist in faith. The priesthood and blood and prayers of our Lord Jesus Christ are a reason for assured and bold faith (as Hebrews 1:1–10:18 argued out in detail). Since Hebrews 10:19 the author of this letter has been urging his readers to draw near to God in bold faith and find strength to persist in Christian godliness<sup>□1</sup>. It would be rebellion to do anything else<sup>□2</sup>, but there is every reason to have patience and press on and so reach the everlasting reward that is laid up for them<sup>□3</sup>. Faith is assurance about the future<sup>□4</sup> and was the outstanding mark of the spiritual heroes of Israel's history<sup>□5</sup>. Such people all received a good commendation from God and his people but we too have to live the same way until we all – saints of the old covenant and saints of the new covenant – receive the promised reward<sup>□6</sup>.

□1 10:19-25  
 □2 10:26-31  
 □3 10:32-39  
 □4 11:1  
 □5 11:20-38  
 □6 11:39-40

**Jesus, the greatest hero of all**

Hebrews 12:1–2 brings chapter 11 to a conclusion in applying the point he has made to himself and his readers (*So therefore let us also...*). But it also prepares the way to introduce Jesus as the greatest hero of faith of all<sup>□1</sup>.

□1 12:3-4

The writer pictures our situation as being like a race. <sup>1</sup>*So therefore let us also – since we have standing around us such a great cloud of people witnessing to us – lay aside every weight and the sin which so easily entangles us, <sup>a</sup> and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, <sup>2</sup>fixing our eyes on Jesus, the founder and perfecter of faith. For the sake of the joy that was set before him he endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. <sup>3</sup>Consider him well! Consider the one who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not become so discouraged that you collapse within yourselves. <sup>4</sup>In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood.*

**The Christian Race**

1. *The crowd encouraging us*
  2. *The runners*
  3. *Light clothing*
- *All hindrances but sinful and 'not useful' things*

1. **There is the crowd who are encouraging us.** In the writer's picture, the people of Hebrews 11 and thousands like them are in the arena shouting to us. They are witnessing to us (it is more than their just being spectators). They are saying to us, 'We were weak people but we achieved our life's call. You can do it as well. Run the race!' There are so many they are like a grey cloud of faces.

2. **There are the runners.** The writer includes himself. 'Let us also...let us run'. They are the believers who have to persist in running the race of faith to the very end.

3. **There is the light clothing.** You do not run a race carrying heavy weights or wearing an overcoat. So our writer wants us to put aside all hindrances (which may not be sinful). And even more he urges us to put aside the particular sin which is dragging us down. Sometimes the hindrances are 'weights' – things that are not specially wrong but which are not useful while running a race. Sometimes some innocent pleasure becomes such a time-consuming part of our life that eventually it becomes a weight that

slows us down. It is even worse when some sin gets a hold upon us. Perhaps at first we do not notice how badly it is slowing us down in the race of faith. Our writer wants us to get rid of it.

#### 4. The way we run

- Persistent endurance

4. **There is the way in which we are to run.** We run with persistence and endurance. We do not stroll along this track admiring the scenery! There will be time for relaxation when the race is finished. At the moment we are in a race that involves effort and which is exhausting. We are tempted to quit because the task is so strenuous. But, says our writer, let us persist. Let us be tough and not faint along the way.

#### 5. The track

5. **There is the track along which we run.** We are to run along the track 'that is set before us'. The route is planned and it is not a route that we choose for ourselves; nor can we change it. We have seen in this letter (notably in chapter 11) that each of the servants of God has a particular calling. We run along **that** track.

#### 6. The winning post



- The originator of salvation's plan

6. **There is the One who is at the winning post.** At the end of the race-track there is Jesus. He is the originator of the race – the entire plan of salvation in which we are involved. He is the perfecter – the one who has got to glory himself and is able to bring us to the winning post. He does it by sustaining us in faith. He looked forward to the joy of the reward. It made him despise every form of disgrace and shame. And now he is victor and conqueror. We are running in a race that is similar to the one in which he ran. If we consider him well – both his example and his support as we run the race – we shall be able to resist the danger of collapsing in discouragement. In any case – says our writer – our case is not as bad as his was. We have not been crucified. We are still alive. The sufferings and troubles are not so bad as long as he is with us.

- The victor who brings us to victory also

#### Note

a. There are two readings here: *euperispastos* ('easily distracting') and *euperistatos* ('easily entangling'). The second is best supported.

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