

May 1, 2011 by Steve Brandon



Run For Your Life

Hebrews 12:1-2

1. Looking to the Heroes (verse 1a)
2. Looking to Yourself (verse 1b)
3. Looking to Jesus (verses 2)

I invite you to open your Bibles to Hebrews 12. Our text this morning covers the first two verses of this great chapter. Allow me to read them now.

Hebrews 12:1-2

Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

John Colter was a mountain man. He loved the outdoors. He loved the wilderness. He loved an adventure. He was one of the few who travelled with Lewis and Clarke on their expedition of 1804-1806. He was skilled in hunting and trapping. As the expedition ended, John Colter took the next two years to continue his exploration of the newly purchased Louisiana Purchase. In 1807, he became "the first known person of European descent to enter the region now known as Yellowstone National Park, and to see the Teton Mountain Range." [\[1\]](#)

He was a tough guy, exploring these ranges in the winter months even when the nighttime temperatures are routinely 30 degrees below zero. After returning to report his findings, he again left to explore the wilderness. One event on that exploration has made John Colter famous.

Colter and a man named John Potts had set some traps and were travelling upstream in their canoe on a Branch of the Missouri river called Jefferson's Fork, checking their traps for animals. Soon, they found themselves surrounded by hundreds of Blackfeet Indians along both sides of the river. The Indians demanded that they come ashore. Colter guided the canoe to the river bank and came ashore. Colter was immediately disarmed stripped of all his clothes, shoes and all. John Potts, however, never got out of the canoe. Instead, he attempted to make his escape. But, he was quickly shot full of arrows.

The Indians then held a counsel to figure out what to do with John Colter. Initially, they thought of setting him up as a mark to shoot at. However, they decided to make sport of him. The Indian Chief placed his hand on Colter's shoulder and asked him if he was a fast runner. Colter, aware of the custom of the Blackfeet Indians, replied that he was very bad runner, even though, in fact, he was a good runner.

Like a fox at a fox-hunt, John Colter was let loose to run for his life. He was given a few hundred yards' head start. Then, at the chief's commands, several hundred Indians were released in pursuit of their fox. Colter could hear the horrid war whoop of the several hundred Indians, who began their hunt. Knowing that his life depended upon it, John Colter ran as fast as he could. Before him was a flat plain, about six miles in breadth, until the Jefferson River. The plain was covered with the prickly pear, which tore into his bare feet. The Indians who pursued him had the advantage of wearing their moccasins.

Colter was half way across the plain before he looked behind him, only to see hundreds of Indians still in pursuit, scattered along the way. He had gained ground on most of them. But, one Indian, who carried a spear in his hand, was less than a hundred yards away.

Within a mile of the river, he began to hear the footsteps of this Indian. At every step, he expected to be struck down by the spear of his pursuer. When he looked back, he saw that he was not 20 yards ahead of him. So, Colter stopped suddenly, turned around and spread out his arms. The Indian was startled by Colter's actions and stumbled to the ground, while he attempted to throw his spear, which stuck in the ground and broke. Colter snagged the appointed part of the spear, pinned the Indian to the earth, killing the Indian, and then continued his flight toward the river.

When the first of the Indians arrived at the place, they stopped and waited for others to join them, upon which they let out a hideous yell. This delay helped Colter, who finally arrived at the edge of the river, fainting and exhausted. He dodged behind the cottonwood trees, gaining some cover and jumped into the river. Fortunately, there was a small island, against which a raft of drift timber had lodged. He dove under the raft, and after a few attempts, was able to get his head above water among the trunks of the trees, covered over with smaller wood to the depth of several feet.

Only a few moments after securing himself, the group of Indians arrived at the river screeching and yelling. The Indians searched for him for much of the day, frequently walking on the raft, where Colter, chilled by the water was able to see them through the chinks in the raft. His greatest fear was that they might set the raft on fire. However, by night fall, the Indians had given up their search. Under cover of the night, Colter dived from under the raft, and swam silently down the river a considerable distance. Finally, he landed and continued to travel all night.

At this point, John Colter was greatly relieved at having escaped from the Indians. But, his situation was still dreadful. He was completely naked, under the burning sun of the day. The soles of his feet were entirely filled with the thorns of the prickly pear. He was hungry and had no means of killing game, although he saw an abundance around him. And, to make matters worse, it was at least a seven days journey to Lisa's Fort, where he would find care and safety.

Most men would have died on the way, but John Colter made it to safety, surviving mostly on a root that was much esteemed by the Indians, known as "Ground Potato." [\[2\]](#)

What a great story. In fact, it's such a great story that John Colter has an historical marker in Stuarts Draft, Virginia, where he was born, which speaks of how he ran for his life. [\[3\]](#)

The title of my message this morning is this: "Run For Your Life." This is what John Colter did. This is what God calls every single one of us this morning to do. God calls you to "Run For Your Life." The imperative of our text is found at the end of verse 1: "Let us run with endurance the race that is set before us." Everything else in these two verses modifies this one command, to run. Looking back to all the examples of all the saints who have gone before us, we are to run. Looking to ourselves to see what weighs us down and distracts us, we are to run. Looking to Jesus -- what He did and where He is now -- we are to run.

Over the past year and a half, as we have worked through the book of Hebrews, we have presented to the church a logo of the book of Hebrews. It's a picture of a runner with the theme of Hebrews: "Jesus Is Better, So Press On." "Running" is merely another way of saying, "press on!" "Pressing on" is another way of saying, "Run with endurance." On the logo is a long-distance runner. He's not a sprinter, looking to run the 100 meter dash. He's a long-distance runner, looking to run a 10K. This is the Christian life. It's not a sprint. It's a long-distance run.

You can see it right there in verse 1: "Let us run with endurance the race that is set before us." The race is long; the race is hard. So, don't stop now. Run with endurance. The sprinter doesn't need endurance. It's the long-distance runner that needs endurance. He needs to run for a long time. He is not to be like the cheetah, which bursts at 70 miles per hour, only to face fatigue the rest of the day. No, he is to be like dogsled huskies, who love to run all day long, everyday.

The Bible speaks of those who sprint in their faith, but falter later on. Do you remember the parable of the sower? (Matt. 13:18-23). Jesus said that the sower sowed the word of God. Some of the seed fell on rocky soil. Some of the seed fell on the thorny soil. On both soils, the seed sprouted. However, they both died out. They either had no firm root or were choked out by the thorns.

The same idea is here: our faith needs to endure. We need to "run with endurance the race that is set before us." We need to "press on."

Notice here the athletic metaphor. It fits the Christian life. It consists of training, hard work, sweat, perseverance, courage, integrity (you have to compete according to the rules), and being goal-oriented. Such metaphors are all over the New Testament. In 2 Timothy, Paul was calling Timothy to "suffer hardship with me as a good soldier of Christ Jesus" (2 Tim. 2:3). Along the same line, Paul describes the Christian life as an athlete, who competes with all his might for the prize, "If anyone competes as an athlete, he does not win the prize, unless he competes according to the rules" (2 Tim. 2:5). In other words, there is a prize to obtain. But, you must obtain it with hard word and diligence and discipline.

At the end of 2 Timothy, Paul affirms his own battle. He says, "I have fought the good fight; I have finished the course; I have kept the faith (2 Tim. 4:7) ... and I'm awaiting the crown which will be rewarded to me," (2 Tim. 4:8) because I have competed like an athlete and have obtained the victory by competing until the end. Paul said in 1 Corinthians 9:24-27, ...

1 Corinthians 9:24

Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win.

And that's the call here in Hebrews 12. The call is to run with endurance, so that you win the prize. But, the idea here of running with endurance the race that is set before us is no game. It's not like you win and get the gold medal, or lose and you merely go home. No, the stakes are much higher than that. My message isn't entitled, "Run For Your Life" for no reason. I believe that if you don't "run with endurance," you may very well lose your life.

That's Paul's point in 1 Corinthians 9, ...

1 Corinthians 9:25-27

Everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things. They then do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. Therefore I run in such a way, as not without aim; I box in such a way, as not beating the air; but I discipline my body and make it my slave, so that, after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified.

Paul may be talking here about being disqualified as a preacher. But, he also may be talking here about being disqualified in his Christian life. At any rate, Paul is striving for the imperishable wreath, which awaits all who run to victory with Jesus. And, certainly, the call of our text here in Hebrews 12 is a call to perseverance to obtain the imperishable prize as well. As much as John Colter was running for his life, the call of our text this morning is equally as urgent. In fact, even more urgent! Jesus said, "Do not fear those who kill the body but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell" (Matt. 10:28). Don't fear those Indians chasing you in any way similar to the way you fear God.

Lest you think I'm over-stating the case, let me show you what I mean. This exhortation is really the conclusion of a line of reasoning that

goes back to the end of chapter 10. Chapter 11 is really a long illustration of the need for enduring faith. Look back at chapter 10, and verse 36. "For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God, you may receive what was promised."

Endure to get the promise! The implication here is clear. If you don't endure, you won't receive what was promised. You say, "Steve, how can that be? I thought that all you needed to do was believe and then you would receive everything that was promised to you." I say, "That's true. Your believing needs to be the right kind of believing" But, I also say that "Genuine faith is enduring faith." Look at the logic of the next few verses, ...

Hebrews 10:37-38

For yet in a very little while, he who is coming will come, and will not delay. But my righteous one shall live by faith; and if he shrinks back, my soul has no pleasure in him.

Christ is coming. The righteous will live by faith. But, if we shrink back from our faith, if our faith doesn't endure, God will have no pleasure in us because genuine faith is enduring faith. The faith that shrinks back is abhorrent in the eyes of God. We need to endure. We need to endure if we want to preserve our soul. Look at verse 39, ...

Hebrews 10:39

But we are not of those who shrink back to destruction, but of those who have faith to the preserving of the soul.

Notice here that faith is the opposite of "shrinking back." Those who have faith are not those who "shrink back," because genuine faith is enduring faith. Hebrews 11 is an extended illustration of faith. We need to have faith to preserve our souls. We need to have faith to enjoy the pleasures of eternal life. I trust you see how high the stakes are this morning. So, church family, "Run For Your Life."

Let's turn now to our text, and my first point. Run For Your Life by ...

1. Looking to the Heroes (verse 1a)

Verse 1 says, "Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, ... let us run with endurance the race that is set before us." Because others have ran before us, and because they have endured in their faith, so too ought we to "run with endurance the race that is set before us." These words are the conclusion to the great hall of faith in chapter 11. That's what the word, "Therefore" signals for us.

Because Abel endured in his faith (Heb. 11:4); because Enoch endured in his faith (Heb. 11:5); because Noah endured in his faith (Heb. 11:7); because Abraham endured in his faith (Heb. 11:8-12, 17-19); because Sarah endured in her faith. (Heb. 11:11); because Isaac endured in his faith (Heb. 11:20); because Jacob endured in his faith (Heb. 11:21); because Joseph endured in his faith (Heb. 11:22); because Moses endured in his faith (Heb. 11:23-29); because Joshua endured in his faith (Heb. 11:30); because Rahab endured in her faith (Heb. 11:31); because Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel, and the Prophets all endured in their faith (Heb. 11:32), so also the call on our lives is to endure in our faith.

Like them, we are to "run with perseverance the race that is set before us" (Heb. 12:1). There is a question of interpretation here. 1. Are these people of faith given to us as examples to which we look for our encouragement and inspiration in our lives of faith? 2. Or, are these people of faith given to us as spectators who are looking at us, cheering us on in our lives of faith? There is a sense where the second interpretation is encouraging, especially as we think of the athletic metaphor and as we think about these witnesses "surrounding us" as fans in a giant coliseum, urging us on in our faith.

The only problem is that I don't think that this is what the author was saying. See, it's not so much that Enoch and Noah and Abraham are in the crowds cheering us on. Rather, it's that they have been faithful, and their lives call us to be faithful as well.

Look at what it says in verse 4 of the faith of Abel. It says that he lived a life of faith until death, and (according to verse 4), "though he is dead, he still speaks." This is not Abel himself who "still speaks", but his testimony of faith lives on! That's what the lives of all of these past heroes of the faith do. They speak to us. They give testimony to us. They are witnesses to us of what a life of faith looks like. Their faith can come as an encouragement to us.

So when we think that the world is against us, we should look to Noah who lived by faith at a time when the world was against him (Heb. 11:7). Or when we think that God hasn't given us everything that He has promised, we should look to Abraham and Sarah, who "died in faith, without receiving the promises, but having seen them and having welcomed them from a distance, and having confessed that they were strangers and exiles on the earth" (Heb. 11:13). Or when we are tempted by the riches of this world, we should look to Moses, who, by faith, "considered the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt; for he was looking to the reward" (Heb. 11:26). Or when we are facing some major struggles and difficulties in our lives, we should look to Israel, who by faith "passed through the Red Sea as though they were passing through dry land" (Heb. 11:29).

They endured. We can endure as well!

And it's not merely those of the Old Testament era that we can look to. No, we can look to all who live by faith, in any era they lived, and be encouraged to press on like they did as well. In Heb. 13:7, we read, ...

Hebrews 13:7

Remember those who led you, who spoke the word of God to you; and considering the result of their conduct, imitate their faith.

There are people that the original writers knew who had lived lives of faith. They were to follow after them, as Hebrews 6:11-12 says. And for us, the examples abound. Not only do we have the heroes of the Old Testament, but we can also look to the many heroes of the New Testament as well.

By faith, Peter and Andrew and James and John all left their boats and followed the Lord (Heb. 4:18-21). By faith, the Syrophenecian Woman begged Jesus for the health of her daughter (Matt. 15:21-28). By faith, the Centurion asked Jesus to help his servant (Matt. 8:5-13). By faith, the blind men cried loudly for Jesus to have mercy on them (Matt. 20:29-34). By faith, Joseph of Arimathea asked Pilate for the body of Jesus (John 19:38). By faith, Peter stood on the day of Pentecost and boldly proclaimed Jesus as the Messiah (Acts 2). By faith, Paul preached Jesus to the Gentiles and suffered for His name (Acts 9:15-16). By faith, Onisephorus was not ashamed of the testimony of Jesus or of Paul, His prisoner (2 Tim. 1:16-18). By faith, Epaphroditus risked his life for those in Philippi (Phi. 2:30). By faith, Timothy served with Paul in the furtherance of the gospel (Phi. 2:22). By faith, John was exiled on the Island of Patmos (Rev. 1:9).

We can also look to the faith of other heroes who went before us. Names that come to my mind are men like these: John Bunyan, Adoniram Judson, David Brainerd, Charles Spurgeon, George Muller, Hudson Taylor, John Paton, Deitrich Bonhoeffer. I have a book on my shelf entitled, "50 People Every Christian Should Know." It's a book of short biographies of 50 Christians. Some are well-known. Others are not:

Katherine von Bora, Samuel Rutherford, Matthew Henry, Jonathan Edwards, George Whitefield, Charles Simeon, Christmas Evans, John Henry Newman, Richard Trench, Andrew Bonar, Robert Murray McCheyne, R. W. Robertson, John Charles Ryle, Fanny Crosby, Alexander Maclaren, J. B. Lightfoot, R. W. Dale, Joseph Parker, J. Hudson Taylor, Charles H. Spurgeon, Phillips Brooks, Frances Ridley Havergal, Alexander Whyte, Dwight L. Moody, George Matheson, C. I. Scofield, F. B. Meyer, W. Robertson Nicoll, Henry Drummond, R. A. Torrey, Thomas Spurgeon, Samuel Chadwick, Charles E. Jefferson, W. H. Griffith Thomas, A. C. Gaebelain, B. H. Carroll, G. Campbell Morgan, John Henry Jowett, J. D. Jones, George H. Morrison, Amy Charnichael, Frank W. Boreham, Joseph W. Kemp, Oswald Chambers, H. A. Ironside, Clarence Edward Macartney, William Whiting Borden, Alva Jay McClain, A. W. Tozer, W. E. Sangster, William Culbertson. [\[4\]](#)

Their lives weren't perfect. Neither was their theology. But, they were people of faith. They are heroes of the faith to whom we can look. The witness of their lives can come as a great encouragement for us to press on in our faith. I commend to you Christian biography. The examples given in chapter 11 are given to encourage our faith. They did; so may we. So also can Christian biography encourage your faith as well.

Well, let's turn to my second point this morning. Run For Your Life by ...
2. Looking to Yourself (verse 1b)

This also comes right from verse 1. "Let us also lay aside very encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, ... and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us."

The picture here is easy to see. The marathon race is about to begin, and all of the runners have been through their warm-ups. They have loosened up, they have stretched their legs, and finally they talk off their warm-up gear. They take off their sweatshirt. They take off their sweatpants. They walk up to the starting line.

That's what all the runners do. They don't run with their sweatpants on. That's silly. They shed their clothes. They remove every type of drag that they might have. Then, they run the race.

And that's what the writer here is calling us to do. Shed anything that hinders your race. Now, here in the text, we see two items listed for us. The first is "every encumbrance." The second is "the sin which so easily entangles us."

These are different things. Let's address the second thing first. "The sin which so easily entangles us." If you notice, the word, "sin" had a definite article in front of it. This means that it's pointing to a singular sin. In the context of the book of Hebrews, I believe that the sin is easily identified as the sin of unbelief.

Remember the situation here? The original hearers were Jews, who had come into the church. The call here is to believe the things that they had heard. They had heard that Jesus is the Messiah, that He was sent from God, that His presence among us is better than anything the Old Testament had to offer. His revelation was better; His priesthood is better; His covenant was better; His sacrifice is better. And if you don't believe those things, you will easily trip up in your life.

Look at what this sin does. "It easily entangles." That is, it has a way of wrapping itself around you, so that you can't run your race. A good picture of this is shackles that are often placed upon the ankles of prisoners, connected by a short chain between them. The chain is long enough to allow a degree of freeness in walking, but they are impossible to run in.

So it is with the sin of unbelief. You cannot run the Christian life with a heart of unbelief. The sin will entangle you and will trip you up. To run the race, you must believe in Christ. Apart from faith in Christ, you cannot run the race. In this sense, the picture of shackles around your ankles is a bit inadequate, because you can still move. But, picture those shackles alive and growing like a vine that creeps up your legs and around your legs. Picture that vine encircling you like a straight-jacket. You try to take a step and soon topple over. You can't hope to begin running in a race.

This is what the sin of unbelief does to your running ability. We can't run with unbelief. However, I think that the same picture is applicable to other sin in our lives, not merely that of unbelief. I say this because of the first thing we are to lay aside.

The first thing: "Let us also lay aside every encumbrance" Strictly speaking, this isn't talking about sin. It's talking about those other things in our lives that merely slow us down.

For instance, take the television. Now, there is nothing wrong with the television. It can be an instrument of good. It can be an instrument of evil. But, the hours it consumes can encumber us in the race. And the writer here is telling us to "lay aside every encumbrance." Not because it's wrong, but because it hinders us. It may be that you should lay aside your television.

It's our children's activities that have us running around here and there. We're so busy, that we are encumbered in our walk with the Lord. It's the internet. It's the video games. It's the video games on the internet. It's our favorite web sites. It's Facebook. It's Farmville. It's our favorite blogs. There is nothing wrong with Facebook or Farmville or Angry Birds or video games. And our blogs may truly help us in our walk.

It's our cars. It's our karate classes. It's our gardening. It's our golfing. It's our iPods, our iPhones, our ice cream. It's our knitting. It's our news channels. It's our movies. It's our magazines. It's our music. It's our pool tables. It's our parties. It's our sports. It's our cell phones. It's texting. It's talking. It's our wood-working projects. It's our water-skiing.

Now, I need to be careful here. I'm not saying that any of these things are wrong. I just tried to help you list some of the non-essential sorts of things that consume our days. And as God has commanded us to rest, some of these activities form a great way for us to rest. God told us to work. But, some vacation is important as well. It helps to refresh us, so that we might be more productive in the end.

But, it may just be that one (or two or ten) of these things are hindrances to you running the race that is set before you. It may well be that there are other things that the Holy Spirit is bringing to your mind right now that I know nothing about, that you need to lay aside. We are to lay aside *every* encumbrance.

And if we are to lay aside those things which aren't sin in our lives, then certainly, we must lay aside every sin. Because, every sin will easily entangle us as well. Oh, may God give us grace to look at ourselves, and see the hindrances and see the sin and turn from those things to run our race.

Let's turn to our third point. Run For Your Life by
3. Looking to Jesus (verses 2)

Hebrews 12:2

fixing our eyes upon Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

These words are so simple. And yet, they are so helpful. "Look to Jesus." Consider who He is. Consider what He has done. Rest in Him. Trust in Him. He will help you in the race.

It is said of runners that they ought not to spend their time and energy looking around them. It throws off their balance. It throws off their stride. Instead, they are to look forward to the finish line. They are to look forward to the goal. This helps them to run the best race that they can.

So also here, we are to "fix our eyes upon Jesus." We are to fix our eyes with riveted attention upon Jesus. He is to be the supreme object of our affection and study.

It has been said that we should glance at the saints and gaze upon Jesus. This is true; looking to Jesus will be far more helpful than looking to the saints. Such is the argument of the entire book of Hebrews. Jesus is better! Jesus is better, more attractive, more helpful, more compassionate than anything else that this world has to offer.

He is better than the angels, because He made the angels and they worship Him. He is better than Moses, because He built the house, rather than merely being a servant within it. He is better than Joshua, because He gives us permanent rest. He is better than the former high priests, because He can fully understand, and because He is full of grace and mercy and is ready to help in time of need. His covenant is better, because it gives grace to our hearts. His sacrifice is better, because it actually removed our sin from us.

Perhaps you know the little chorus, ...

Turn your eyes upon Jesus,
Look full in His wonderful face,
And the things of earth will grow strangely dim,
In the light of His glory and grace.

That's a bit of the idea here. As we look to Jesus, we will see everything in Him that is attractive. We will see everything in Him that is lovely. We will see everything in Him that sets Him above every care of this world. And seeing His glory and His grace will strengthen us for our run in the race.

I love the way that this chorus emphasizes a full look at Jesus. "Look full in His wonderful face." This is the case because of the credentials of Jesus. It's not merely that Jesus had faith like everyone else. No, He has a different relationship to faith that gives us reason to look especially to Him.

Verse 2 says He is the "author" of faith (verse 2). That is, He is the founder of our faith. He is the originator of our faith. It says in Hebrews

2:10 that he is the "author" of salvation. He is the one that designed it. He is the source of our salvation (Heb. 2:9). He is the one that executed our salvation for us. In Hebrews 6:20, we read that Jesus is our "forerunner," who has entered the heavenly sanctuary before us, preparing the way.

Verse 2 also says He is the "perfecter" of faith (verse 2). Jesus, the perfect one (5:9;7:28), is the one who perfects us in our faith. He strengthens our faith. He helps us in our weaknesses (Heb. 4:15). He gives us the mercy that we need (Heb. 4:16). He gives us the grace that we need (Heb. 4:16). He helps us in our temptations (Heb. 2:18). He prays for us through our struggles (Heb. 7:25) "He is able to save forever those who draw near to God through Him" (Heb. 7:25). His credentials are so much better than any of the saints.

Not only was He the "author" of faith and the "perfecter" of faith. But, he also endured through faith as well. Verse 1 called us to "run with endurance the race that is set before us." Verse 2 tells us that Jesus "ran with endurance the race that was set before Him."

Look at verse 2, ...

Hebrews 12:2

who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Again, we see the same word that has come up several times in this text: "Endurance." We are called to "run with endurance." Jesus, likewise, "endured" the cross.

And you know the story of what Jesus did on the cross. He willingly gave Himself up to death on the cross. He experienced great pain and agony of dying on the cross. I've explained it to you before the process of death upon the cross. It's like "drowning slowly." Just when you are about out of oxygen, your body convulses, and you get another gasp of air to sustain you for a few moments longer.

But, please note that it's not the pain of the cross that is identified here as the thing that Jesus endured. Rather, it's the "shame" of the cross that he endured. It's the shame of the cross that was far more painful than the agony of nails in His hands and feet. It's the shame of the cross that was far more painful than dying slowly.

When Jesus was upon the cross, He was naked and exposed for all the world to see. He was mocked and despised by those He came to save. But, most important of all, He was cursed of God. He was abandoned by His heavenly Father.

According to the law, "Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree" (Deut. 21:23). Jesus Christ "became a curse for us" (Gal. 3:13). He died in our place, that we might live. That's the glories of the gospel. That's why Jesus gladly took that shame upon Himself.

According to verse 2, Jesus endured these things "with joy." It was "for the joy set before Him" that He "endured the cross" (verse 2). It wasn't the joy of the cross. Rather, it was the joy of knowing what the cross would bring. Jesus knew the prophesy of Isaiah 53:11, ...

Isaiah 53:11

As a result of the anguish of His soul,
He will see it and be satisfied;
By His knowledge the Righteous One,
My servant, will justify the many,
As He will bear their iniquities.

This verse is talking about the joy of the Messiah after the redemption. It was "for the joy set before Him" that He "endured the cross" (verse 2). Jesus knew the end.

One of the fighter verses that we recently memorized in our prayer meeting is James 1:2, "Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials." It's not the trial you consider to be all joy. Rather, it's the fruit of the trial that you consider it joy.

James 1:3-4

knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance, and let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

The trial brings us to perfection. Thus, we can endure it with joy. So likewise with Jesus. He knew that the trial of the cross would bring great joy in heaven, as He would bring many sons to glory through it.

So, let's look to Jesus, the exalted One. Let's look to Jesus, "who has sat down at the right hand of God," that is, the place of victory and strength. Let us "Run For Our Lives", by Looking to the Heroes and Looking to Ourselves, but especially Looking to Jesus.

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on May 1, 2011 by Steve Brandon.

For more information see www.rvbc.cc.

[1] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Colter

[2] My text above followed the account recorded by John Bradbury, who personally spoke with John Colter and recorded his story. The complete text of the story can be found here: <http://lewis-clark.org/content/content-article.asp?ArticleID=2616>

[3] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Colter

[4] <http://www.amazon.com/People-Every-Christian-Should-Know/dp/0801071941>