

Looking To Jesus

September 1st, 2019

✓ **Hebrews 12:1-2 (ESV)**

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, [2] 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.

A couple of weeks ago my Children's Time message was based on this passage and this morning I'd like to expand that message to all of the "older" children of God here this morning! You may recall that I said that I could not understand why Jesus endured the cross with "joy." I think I now know and will explain later.

The saints of old were looking to not only a city whose architect and builder was God, but also to a person, the Messiah, Jesus Christ. By faith they saw Christ. It was this vision of Christ that motivated them to endure. Moses left Egypt having seen Him who is invisible. If we are to endure to the end, we too must be looking to the unseen Christ.

✓ **Hebrews 11:1 (ESV)**

Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.

Read through chapter 11 of this Book known as the "heroes of faith." Has the testimony of the heroes of faith left you encouraged continuing your walk of faith? This text today is the proper place that Chapter 11 should lead us to.

1. Every Christian Must Run in the Race ✓ (Hebrews 12:1)

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,

The imagery created by the apostle is a race in the coliseum in ancient Rome. Those Old Testament saints have finished their race. Abel, Enoch,

Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses and many others have already finished the race. They saw the finish line at death and crossed it in faith. Multitudes have been a part of the same race. They also crossed the finish line. Now, it's our turn.

The great cloud of witnesses is growing all the time. As believers, one by one cross the finish line they are taking their place in the great cloud of witnesses. This group is like a roaring crowd at a track meet and they not only left us their example but are literally cheering for us as we run. The sound is deafening as each believer today finishes the race.

The apostle challenges believers with two great strategies for the Christian life.

1. Let Us Lay Aside Every Weight and Sin

The Christian life is an endurance race. It's not a sprint. One key to finishing well is to become as aerodynamic as possible. Runners wear light clothing and light shoes. A marathon runner would be foolish to drag behind him a fifty-pound weight while he ran. It would slow him down tremendously and wear him out prematurely and the runner may not even finish the race.

The apostle compares this weight to sin. In the same way that dragging a weight behind us while running slows us down, so sin keeps us from performing as we should. His advice, cut loose, lay it aside.

2. Let Us Run the Race with Endurance

We are to run the race and set aside sin. Also, in this first verse, he tells us to ✓ ***run with endurance the race that is set before us,***

In other words, just as Moses had a race to run and Joseph had his race, we too have ours. Ours isn't a race that is like anyone else's. Our race as with everyone else's is a unique race. Everyone's life is different. Our sovereign Lord has placed each of us on a different course. My race will not be like yours. Some of the things I struggle with along the way may not be your struggles. However, the finish line and the strategy are the same.

Lay aside sin and look to the finish line.

Paul's strategy was much the same.

✓ *Philippians 3:12-14 (ESV)*

Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. [13] Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, [14] I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

Paul also shows us how to cut loose the sin that entangles us and weighs us down.

By faith we are to realize we are dead to sin.

✓ *Romans 6:6-14 (ESV)*

We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. [7] For one who has died has been set free from sin. [8] Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. [9] We know that Christ being raised from the dead will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. [10] For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God. [11] So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus. [12] Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal bodies, to make you obey their passions. [13] Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness. [14] For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.

Also, realize that this laying aside of sin is a life-long process. We're pack rats of sin. Pack rats make poor athletes. Let go of all things that hinder our running the race.

Many seek to look like athletes by imposing religion on themselves. Some seek to look athletic by false humility or piousness. However, these self-efforts are of no value when seeking to lay aside sin.

Exercising faith in Christ is the only way. As we seek Christ and learn from Him and his ways and love Him more and more our affections for Christ rise. He becomes our treasure not our sin. Letting go of the weight of sin is easier if we love Christ more than we love sin.

Sin's ploy is to cause us to become attached to it. It's like a drug addiction. Why can't an addict stop? He finds some security and fulfillment in the exercising of his addiction. Sin works the same way. Why can't a gambler stop losing his paycheck every week? In some twisted way the idea he thought he could control at first is now controlling him because he finds some fulfillment in the exercise of the sin. He tells himself that it only takes one time of winning the Lottery to recover all my losses. Those kinds of lies are the way sin works.

If we are to cut these sins loose, we must see Christ and understand that in Him all the benefits of the sin will be met and an infinite number more. One who plays the lottery in an addictive way seeking riches can stop and cut it loose when he discovers the riches of Christ. A drug addict can stop when he discovers the glory of Christ and desires Him more than the high or the rush the drug provides.

We can cut this stuff loose when we grab a hold onto Jesus.

Moses saw Christ and released the weight and sin of the riches of Egypt. It took Christ to cause him to see the futility of earthly wealth when compared to heavenly wealth.

2. Every Christian must Look to Christ ✓ (Hebrews 12:2-3)

[2] 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.

[3] Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted.

Runners are always challenged to not look back or behind them if they begin to hear footsteps. This looking back often costs them a stride. In a footrace one stride can be the difference in winning and losing.

The apostle tells us to keep our eyes and concentration on Jesus. If we are to look to Christ, we must look away from other things. We can't have our vision fixed on our sin or possessions and on Jesus at the same time. Taking our eyes off of Jesus is the same as looking back.

A. Look to Christ as Others Have

We have learned through many examples in Chapter 11 how others looked to Christ. We should see Abel's commitment to offer a blood sacrifice, Noah's example of perseverance as he looked to and trusted God. Abraham believed God and he was counted with Christ's righteousness. Moses saw the One who is invisible and his life immediately was altered. Once these saints by faith saw Christ, they never looked back. That's a good example for us. Fix your eyes on Christ like the Old Testament saints did and never look away.

B. Look to Christ the Author and Perfecter of Our Faith

We are to look to Jesus by faith because our faith came from Him. It originates with Jesus. Here's a key if we are to run the Christian race with endurance...we not only receive faith initially from Christ, but we receive faith daily from Christ. He is ✓ **the founder and perfecter** of our faith. Faith was originally created by Christ and distributed to His people. He then is working with us to perfect that faith. We should look to Him for faith and look to Him daily to have our faith perfected.

How is our faith perfected? Jesus works with us through the Holy Spirit. As we run the race of the Christian life, the Spirit of Christ supplies the necessary help to run and help to finish.

✓ **Ephesians 3:14-19 (ESV)**

For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, [15] from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, [16] that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, [17] so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in

love, [18] may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, [19] and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

How do we access this spiritual strength? Not by focusing on the Holy Spirit but by focusing on Christ the One He glorifies.

C. Look to Christ and Imitate His Example of Endurance

✓"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. "

We look to Christ as the saints of old did. We look to Christ because He is the supplier of everything we need to run the race. Finally, we look to Christ because in Him we find a clear example to imitate. Here is what I learned about *"the joy that was set before Him."*

Jesus endured the cross by looking past it to the **joy that would follow after He endured the shame and the pain!** He shows us how to endure hardship. When we enter into a difficult situation, don't ever think the rest of your life will be as hard as the situation that you now find to be difficult. By faith look to the promises of God. Look past the challenge and see Christ seated on the throne. Look past the hardship and see the kingdom of God. Remember, we're only on this earth for a while and we must get ready for heaven.

As we come to the Table this morning, remember that because Jesus endured the cross we are reconciled to God. Because Jesus didn't quit but stayed the course and ran with endurance His race, multitudes are now blessed. He did that as He looked to the Joy of having for Himself a people for God. This is the greatest love story ever told. He loves us so much that He willingly took our sins and nailed them to the cross. He died so we could live eternally with Him.

Jesus looked forward and never looked back as His race led Him to the cross. Sometimes as we run the race we're led to places of struggle. We can

always remember there is a Savior named Jesus Christ who endured more pain and heartache than we ever will. He kept running and finished His course. We, too, must endure as we run the race set before us. Look to Jesus and look away from all other things, and run. Run hard and run long listening to the cloud of witnesses cheering and seeing Christ at the finish line.