

LOOKING TO JESUS, THE FOUNDER AND FINISHER: Hebrews 12:1-2

INTRO: The target the Christian aims at is glorifying God and enjoying Him by being faithful to Him (v. 1a)

Hebrews 12:1a "Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses,"

I. HOW TO BE FAITHFUL TO JESUS

I) Lay aside everything that keeps you from total devotion to Jesus

Hebrews 12:1b "let us also lay aside every weight,"

- **CALVIN:** "Now there are various burdens which delay and impede our spiritual course, such as the love of this present life, the pleasures of the world, the lusts of the flesh, worldly cares, riches also and honors, and other things of this kind."
- **Like foolish hikers who load their backpacks with heavy trinkets and complain that the path is hard,** are Christians who weigh themselves down with worldly loves and grumble that the Christian life is just too difficult.
- **(CHILDREN, if you are going on a long walk, should you put heavy rocks in your backpack?)**
- **1 John 2:17** "The world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever."
 - **Q.** What are you clinging to that is truly hindering you from glorifying and enjoy God by being faithful to Him?
- **Oh how many Christians are weighed down by habits or luxuries or commitments or entertainments that keep them from being faithful and fruitful.** These weights keep you from glorifying and enjoying Jesus!
- **Dear brothers and sisters, do not waste your life weighed down by honorable distractions;** make the best use of the time, for the days are evil.
- "Let us also lay aside every weight" and "take Heaven by storm!"

II) Be killing sin or sin will be encircling you

Hebrews 12:1c "and sin which clings so closely"

- **Sin is an enemy so clever** that you will be outflanked before you even know what is happening.
- **Sin, like Jael in the book of Judges**, provides a nice place for you to lie still, then drives a tent peg through your head when your guard is down.
- **If you do not make it your daily business to put to death your sin and temptations** then you are sitting down in the trenches of battle, allowing the enemy to surround you. You may be so weak and immature simply because you do not fight.
 - **Q.** What is entangling you? What besetting sins or lazy habits or time-wasting commitments are in fact allowing you to be encircled by sin?
- **Beloved, stand up in the trenches, casting down any weight, and fire back at the enemy** with the Word of God, prayer, meditation, singing, making the best use of the time, self-examination, and serving!
- **Paul urges Timothy**, "Keep a close watch on YOURSELF and on your DOCTRINE."

III) Patiently run the race that God has set before you

Hebrews 12:1d "and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us"

- **The race has been set before us!** God determines where and how you run.
- **Amos 6:1** "Woe to those who are at ease in Zion."
- **You must not be a spiritual spectator;** you must be a spiritual athlete! You are not in the stands or on the couch; you are in the game!
 - **Q.** Are you seated in the coliseum, watching the other athletes, perhaps even cheering them on? Or are you running the race that God has clearly revealed in the Scriptures that He created and redeemed you to run?
- **1 Corinthians 9:24-27** "Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it. Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. So I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air. But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified."
- **The Christian life is not a sprint nor is it a midrange race;** it is a marathon. You and I have need of patient endurance!
- **(CHILDREN, do you enjoy running a race? The Christian life is like that!)**

Q. How are you and I going to get the strength to patiently endure to the end?

II. HOW TO GET STRENGTH TO BE FAITHFUL TO JESUS

I) Look to Jesus alone for salvation and strength

Hebrews 12:2a "looking to Jesus"

- Apart from Jesus you can do NOTHING GOOD; oh but ALL THINGS GOOD you can do in Christ who infuses you with strength!
- **Christ must be the North star your eyes are fixed on; He is True North!** If you will not look at Jesus, you will walk in darkness.
 - **Q.** To what or to whom are you looking?
- **There is no salvation nor is there strength in yourself!** There is no salvation nor is their strength in Moses! Oh but there is an endless supply of salvation and strength in Christ Jesus, who is full of grace and truth!

II) Look to Jesus, the Founder and Finisher of your faith

Hebrews 12:2b "the founder and perfecter of our faith"

- **Luke 14:28-30** "For which of you, desiring to build a tower, does not first sit down and count the cost, whether he has enough to complete it? Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, saying, 'This man began to build and was not able to finish.'"
- **Jesus does not lay the foundation of the house then subcontract the rest of the work out,** hoping it will be finished. He is the founder AND finisher of our faith.
- **The Lord Jesus Christ is not only the FOUNDER of your faith,** buying you back from sin and death on the cross for your justification; **He is also the FINISHER,** preserving you by His Spirit all the way to your glorification.
- **Oh look at the glorious Christ who is the Alpha and Omega,** the beginning and the end, not only of the entire universe but also of each particular saint He redeems.
- **Philippians 1:6** "He who began a good work in you (FOUNDER) will bring it to completion (FINISHER)."
 - **Q.** Do you look to Christ in faith, trusting Him to be the founder of your faith? Do you also look to Christ in faith, trusting Him to be your Finisher?
- **Weary saint, Christ has paid too high a price in founding your salvation** to let you slip through His fingers and remain unfinished. He is

the founder and finisher of our faith.

III) Look to Jesus, who patiently endured the cross for you

Hebrews 12:2c "who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross"

- **Q.** What was the joy? WHAT WAS THE JOY?!
- **A.** To glorify His Father BY purifying His saints!
- **(CHILDREN - What makes Jesus happy? Forgiving you of your sin and making you part of His family)**

Q. Yet what did He endure? **A.** He endured the shame He despised.

IV) Look to Jesus, who endured the shame He despises for even you

Hebrews 12:2d "despising the shame"

- **Q.** Does it make you sick to your stomach to feel the shame that comes from sin? Do you hate the shame that comes from your disobedience to God?
- **Jesus hates it more.** Yet He endured your shame on the cross, for the joy that was set before Him!
- **(CHILDREN) Q.** Think about the Lord Jesus Christ having nails driven through His hands and feet, suspended on the wood of the cross, suffocating to death as He hung there naked and exposed. Does it make your stomach turn thinking how shameful and embarrassing that must have been?
- **It made Jesus' stomach turn more.** He was the one naked. He was the one mocked. He was the one pierced. He was the one cursed by being hung on a tree. Yet He endured the shame of the cross, for the joy that was set before Him.

V) Look to Jesus, who wears the crown and holds the scepter

Hebrews 12:2e "and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God."

- **1 Corinthians 15:24-26** "Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death."

[pdf](#) William Gouge commentary on Hebrews

[pdf](#) Isaac Ambrose, looking unto Jesus (book)

[pdf](#) Thomas Manton, Farewell Sermon (great ejection)

V. 1

- **RHST: Hebrews 12:1–4** The opening section of ch. 12 connects closely with ch. 11. The focus of these verses is centered on Jesus and His relationship to the faith of the Old Testament saints.
- **RHST: Hebrews 12:1** *Wherefore*. Consequently, strong conjunction connecting chs. 11–12. *cloud of witnesses*. This cloud of witnesses is not primarily given for moral encouragement, but serves like witnesses in a courtroom to God's redemptive purposes. *sin which doth so easily beset us*. Especially the sins of unbelief and apostasy. The race is set before believers, shows that God determines this race.
- **ESV HEBREWS—NOTE ON 12:1–29** Endurance until the Kingdom Fully Comes. Given past examples of faith (ch. 11) and of Jesus' own endurance of the cross (12:1–2), Christians are to run with endurance the race of faith, knowing that God disciplines his children for their good (vv. 3–11). The readers are thus also cautioned against rejecting God's grace (vv. 12–17, 25), since (in comparison with lesser yet still awesome events at Mount Sinai) the overwhelming final judgment will surely come, when God will fully establish his rule and when all the saints will join the great heavenly celebration.
- **ESV HEBREWS—NOTE ON 12:1–2** Jesus, Founder and Perfecter of Faith. In light of the previous examples of faith (ch. 11), and especially in light of Jesus' own model of endurance, believers are called to endure as runners in a race.
- **ESV HEBREWS—NOTE ON 12:1** cloud of witnesses. These are the OT "heroes of the faith" in ch. 11, as is indicated by the therefore in 12:1 and by the Greek wordplay between "witnesses" (*martys*, v. 1) and "commended" (*martyreō*, 11:39). "Witnesses" may have a double meaning: (1) These OT heroes witnessed to their faith by their words and their faithful lives. (2) Like spectators watching an athletic contest in an arena, they may now be watching or "witnessing" believers' lives. The first sense is a common meaning for the word, but in this verse the imagery of being surrounded by these witnesses gives the sense that they are eagerly watching from heaven, and the image of running the race that is set before us might lead one to think of an athletic race in a

sports arena, with all these heroes of the faith from ch. 11 watching as present-day believers take their turn in the same race that they once ran. However, nowhere else does the NT envisage saints in heaven watching saints on earth, nor does it encourage Christians ever to pray to these believers in heaven or to ask for their prayers. Christ prays for his people (Rom. 8:34; Heb. 7:25) and is the only mediator between them and God (1 Tim. 2:5). The Holy Spirit helps their prayers (Rom. 8:26–27), and all Christians are priests with the right of direct access to God (Heb. 4:16; 10:22; 1 Pet. 2:5, 9). lay aside. This first exhortation pictures sin as a weight (or “impediment”) to be discarded, since otherwise it ensnares or obstructs the athlete. let us run. A metaphor also found in Paul (1 Cor. 9:24–27; 2 Tim. 4:7–8), with a focus on endurance in the faith (see Heb. 12:2–3; cf. 10:32, 36).

- **JMAC Hebrews 12:1** *Therefore*. This is a very crucial transition word offering an emphatic conclusion (cf. 1Th 4:8) to the section which began in 10:19. witnesses. The deceased people of chap. 11 give witness to the value and blessing of living by faith. Motivation for running “the race” is not in the possibility of receiving praise from observing heavenly saints. Rather, the runner is inspired by the godly examples those saints set during their lives. The great crowd is not comprised of spectators but rather is comprised of ones whose past life of faith encourages others to live that way (cf. 11:2, 4, 5, 33, 39). let us. The reference is to those Hebrews who had made a profession of Christ, but had not gone all the way to full faith. They had not yet begun the race, which starts with salvation. The writer has invited them to accept salvation in Christ and join the race. every encumbrance. Different from the “sin” mentioned next, this refers to the main encumbrance weighing down the Hebrews which was the Levitical system with its stifling legalism. The athlete would strip away every piece of unnecessary clothing before competing in the race. The outward things emphasized by the Levitical system not only impede, they “entangle.” sin. In this context, this focuses first on the particular sin of unbelief—refusing to turn away from the Levitical sacrifices to the perfect sacrifice, Jesus Christ (cf. Jn 16:8–11), as well as other sins cherished by the unbeliever. endurance. Endurance is the steady determination to keep going, regardless of the temptation to slow down or give up (cf. 1Co 9:24, 25). race. The athletic metaphor presents the faith-filled life as a demanding, grueling effort. The Eng. word “agony” is derived from the Gr. word used here. See note on Mt 7:14.

V. 2

- **RHST: Hebrews 12:2** Jesus. Jesus is not a final example of faith, but the

author and finisher of our faith. Jesus' relationship to faith is qualitatively different than the heroes of the Old Testament. Whereas each Old Testament example apprehended the promise of God through faith, Christ was the captain, content, and consummator of it all. author. Same word used in 2:10 for "captain." finisher. A cognate word of the Greek *telos* which, here, shows that faith finds its focus and basis in Jesus. joy that was set before him. The suffering of the cross was endured because it led to His enthronement at the right hand of the throne of God, the ultimate joy.

- **ESV HEBREWS—NOTE ON 12:2** *funder*. See note on 2:10. perfecter. Through his atoning work, Christ's perfection leads to the perfection of his people (which will be realized fully on the last day; see note on 11:39–40). *for the joy that was set before him endured*. The cross of Christ represents the greatest suffering in history, for Jesus not only suffered physically but also experienced God's just wrath in taking upon himself the sin of the world. Still, the promise of future reward and joy gave Jesus strength to suffer. despising the shame. Crucifixion, performed naked and in public, and inflicting prolonged pain on the victim, was intended to cause shame as well as death (cf. 6:6; see note on Matt. 27:35). *at the right hand*. See Heb. 1:3, 13; 8:1; 10:12.
- **JMAC HEBREWS 12:2** *fixing our eyes on*. They were to look to Jesus as the object of faith and salvation (cf. 11:26, 27; Ac 7:55, 56; Php 3:8). author. See note on 2:10. The term means originator or preeminent example. perfecter. See note on 5:14. The term expresses the idea of carrying through to perfect completion (cf. Jn 19:30). the joy. Jesus persevered so that He might receive the joy of accomplishment of the Father's will and exaltation (cf. 1:9; Ps 16:9–11; Lk 10:21–24). right hand. See note on 1:3.