

Hebrews 12:2-3
August 21, 2016

Open with Prayer

HOOK:

We began our study of Chp 12 last week. The writer of Hebrews introduced a life metaphor that maybe we don't think about as much. He suggests that life is like a race that has been set before us. And we don't just show up for a race! It's something we are always training for.

Transition: This week we pick up where we left off, which means we will be starting in verse 2! In the meantime, our objective for today's lesson remains the same as it was last week: **All of us CAN run the race marked out for us BY following the INSTRUCTIONS of the Hebrew writer.** There are multiple instructions packed into the first three verses of Chp 12. Let's see what they are and how we can encourage one another to follow them in our own race set before us.

BOOK (NIV 1984):

V.2:

- Let us **fix our eyes on Jesus**, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

V.3:

- **Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.**

Process Observations/Questions:

Q v.2: What is the fourth instruction you see to run the race set before us? [Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith.]

Q: This has to be one of the most inspiring instructions! What does it look like practically to "fix our eyes on Jesus?" [It was in "looking to Him" that we were saved, for **to look means "to trust."** When the dying Jews looked to the uplifted serpent, they were healed; and this is an illustration of our salvation through faith in Christ (Num. 21:4-9; John 3:14-16). "Looking unto Jesus" describes an *attitude* of faith and not just a single act. Since Christ is the "author and finisher of our faith," ***trusting Him releases His power in our lives.***]

Q: Notice that Jesus endured the cross "for the joy set before Him." What was it that enabled our Lord to endure the cross? [Keep in mind that, during His ministry on earth, our Lord did not use His divine powers for His own personal needs. Satan tempted Him to do this (Matt. 4:1-4), but Jesus refused. ***It was our Lord's faith that enabled Him to endure.*** He kept the eye of faith on "the joy that was set before Him." X-REF Psalm 16:8-10: He knew that He would come out of the tomb alive. This is a statement of the obvious, but don't we all need to know where the finish line is and what the reward is before we start training for the race? [Let people engage this.]

Q: Do any of us “endure the race set before us” knowing the “joy that has been set before us?” [There are times I think I’m enduring, but I also know that God is faithful and sees me through all circumstances.]

Q v.3: What is the last instruction we see? [Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.]

Q: What perspective is the author trying to help these Hebrew Christians to get? [Jesus is our ultimate model of someone who endured the cross at the hands of sinful men. Nothing that we are experiencing will ever come close to what Christ experienced. So if we can keep Jesus front and center in our hearts and minds as we live by faith, we will not “grow weary and lose heart.”]

LOOK:

I have suggested that all of us can run the race that’s been set before us by following the instructions of these writers. I trust that the Holy Spirit is tapping each of us by showing us where we can keep our eyes fixed on Jesus, who endured the cross for the “joy set before Him.”

Close in Prayer

Commentaries for Today's Lesson:

Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible Exposition Commentary* (Vol. 2, p. 323). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

The Example of the Son of God (Heb. 12:2–4)

Look at Jesus Christ! (vv. 2–4) He is “the author [originator] and finisher of our faith.” It was in “looking to Him” that we were saved, for *to look* means “to trust.” When the dying Jews looked to the uplifted serpent, they were healed; and this is an illustration of our salvation through faith in Christ (Num. 21:4–9; John 3:14–16). “Looking unto Jesus” describes an *attitude* of faith and not just a single act.

When our Lord was here on earth, He lived by faith. The mystery of His divine and human natures is too profound for us to understand fully, but we do know that He had to trust His Father in heaven as He lived day by day. The writer of Hebrews quoted our Lord saying, “I will put My trust in Him” (Heb. 2:13). (The quotation is from Isa. 8:17.) The fact that Jesus *prayed* is evidence that He lived by faith.

Our Lord endured far more than did any of the heroes of faith named in Hebrews 11, and therefore He is a perfect example for us to follow. *He endured the cross!* This involved shame, suffering, the “contradiction [opposition]” of sinners, and even temporary rejection by the Father. On the cross He suffered for *all* the sins of *all* the world! Yet He endured and finished the work the Father gave Him to do (John 17:4). Though the readers of Hebrews had suffered persecution, they had not yet “resisted unto blood” (Heb. 12:4). None of them was yet a martyr. But in Jesus’ battle against sin, He shed His own blood.

What was it that enabled our Lord to endure the cross? Please keep in mind that, during His ministry on earth, our Lord did not use His divine powers for His own personal needs. Satan tempted Him to do this (Matt. 4:1–4), but Jesus refused. It was our Lord’s *faith* that enabled Him to endure. He kept the eye of faith on “the joy that was set before Him.” From Psalm 16:8–10, He knew that He would come out of the tomb alive. (Peter referred to this messianic psalm in his sermon at Pentecost, Acts 2:24–33.) In that psalm (16:11) David speaks about “fullness of joy” in the presence of the Father. Also, from Psalm 110:1, 4, Jesus knew that He would be exalted to heaven in glory. (Peter also quoted this psalm—Acts 2:34–36.) So “the joy that was set before Him” would include Jesus’ completing the Father’s will, His resurrection and exaltation, and His joy in presenting believers to the Father in glory (Jude 24).

Throughout this epistle, the writer emphasized the importance of the *future hope*. His readers were prone to *look back* and want to *go back*, but he encouraged them to follow Christ’s example and *look ahead* by faith. The heroes of faith named in the previous chapter lived for the future, and this enabled them to endure (Heb. 11:10, 14–16, 24–27). Like Peter, when we get our eyes of faith off the Saviour, we start to sink (Matt. 14:22–33).

Since Christ is the “author and finisher of our faith,” trusting Him releases His power in our lives. I could try to follow the example of some great athlete for years and still be a failure. But if, in my younger days, that athlete could have entered into my life and shared his know-how and ability with me, that would have made me a winner. Christ is both the exemplar *and the enabler!* As we see Him in the Word and yield to His Spirit, He increases our faith and enables us to run the race.

Pentecost, J. D. (1985). Daniel. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures (Vol. 2, pp. 809-810). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

The author concluded the basic argument of the epistle with a final admonition and warning. As usual his hortatory section grew directly out of the expository one which preceded it. His discussion of the life of faith now led to another call for perseverance.

1. THE INTRODUCTORY ADMONITION (12:1–2)

12:1–2. The life of faith has been amply attested by this **great cloud of Old Testament witnesses**. (This does not mean that they watch believers today.) Hence believers ought to **run with perseverance** (*hypomonēs*; cf. 10:32, 36; 12:2–3, 7) **the race marked out** in their Christian lives, setting aside whatever **hinders and the sin that so easily entangles** (*euperistaton*, “ambushes or encircles”). Their supreme Model for this continued to be **Jesus**, however admirable any Old Testament figure might be. He is both **the Author and Perfecter of our faith**. The word “author” (*archēgon*) was used in 2:10 (see comments there) and suggests that Jesus “pioneered” the path of faith Christians should follow. He also “perfected” the way of faith since He reached its end successfully. He kept His eye on **the joy set before Him**, the “joy” alluded to in 1:9 wherein He obtained an eternal throne. The believers’ share in that joy must also be kept in view. After enduring (*hypemeinen*, the verb related to the noun *hypomonē* in 12:1; cf. vv. 3, 7) **the cross and scorning its shame**, Jesus assumed that triumphant position **at the right hand of the throne of God** (cf. 1:3; 8:1; 10:12) which presages His and the believers’ final victory (cf. 1:13–14).

2. THE REMINDER THAT THINGS ARE NOT AS BAD AS THEY SEEM (12:3–11)

Nothing is more natural for a person than to overestimate the severity of his trials. The writer did not want his audience to do that.

12:3–4. If they would **consider the opposition from sinful men** which Jesus confronted and **endured** (*hypomemenēkota*; cf. vv. 1–2, 7), they would be encouraged. After all, unlike Him, they had **not yet resisted ... sin ... to the point of bloodshed**. By “sin” the author probably primarily meant that of “sinful men” who opposed them, but doubtless also had their own sin in mind, which they had to resist in order to maintain a steadfast Christian profession.