

## Fixing Our Eyes on Jesus

Good evening everyone,

Let us begin by reading Hebrews 12:1-3 (LSB),

*“Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, laying aside every weight and the sin which so easily entangles us, 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. For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you will not grow weary, fainting in heart.”*

Before we can rightly hear Hebrews 12:1-3, we should all try to understand what was happening in the church that prompted this epistle to be written, and who’s involved?

Hebrews was written to a community of Jewish Christians who lived in a Greek part of the world, possibly Rome, and were living under intense pressure for their confession of Christ. Their allegiance to Jesus had already cost them dearly within their Jewish communities, and the wider Greco-Roman world viewed this growing “Christian” movement with a lot of suspicion. Years of suffering had taken their toll, and these believers were growing weary. Surely these Christians were beginning to doubt, asking questions like “Has Jesus sacrifice truly dealt with sin and the powers that rule our world? If Christ has won, why does obeying Him seem to only bring us suffering?”

In this exhaustion, the pull of Judaism seemed tempting. The Book of Hebrews is the answer to the temptation to revert back to Judaism, its message is that Christ is superior to angels, superior to Moses, superior to the priesthood, and superior to every covenant that came before Him.

Hebrews 12:1-3 stands at the climactic turn of this book. After recounting the faith of the ancestors in chapter 11, the author presses the present generation to endure. They (and we also) needed to keep their eyes fixed on Jesus. This passage trains us to think “Christotelically”.

Christotelic is a word I love to use. It comes from two Greek words: *Christos*, obviously meaning Christ, and *telos*, meaning the ultimate goal, end, or purpose of something. We, as believers, must think Christotelically, because Christ can’t just be a part of our lives, He is the ultimate goal, end, and purpose of our lives. He is the center of history and Scripture. Everything that exists finds its meaning and purpose in Him.

Hebrews doesn’t ask its readers to admire Jesus, or imitate Jesus, or believe very niche theological things about Jesus. It commands them to fix their person on Him! Christ is

the origin of our faith, and He is its completion. He has run race before us, and He will bring it to an end.

Hebrews 12:1-3 matter because it teaches us how to think and live.

## I. THE CLOUD OF WITNESSES: COSMIC CONTEXT FOR THE RACE (Heb 12:1a)

Let's start with the first word of Hebrews 12, "Therefore". Wise disciples of Scripture will remember to always place careful attention on these connecting words. The author is letting us know that everything he just wrote about in Hebrews 11 will flow directly into the next. Hebrews 11 and the Hall of Faith is the foundation. Before the author tells his hearers to run, he has first reminded them who has run before them.

The phrase "so great a cloud of witnesses" is often greatly misunderstood. Many imagine a stadium filled with cheering saints. They're all in heaven in right, hopping and rolling around on clouds, playing their golden harps, watching us from up there. Maybe they're applauding my perseverance? Maybe they're up there shaking their heads at my failures?

That's not what the text is emphasizing. The author isn't letting us know that *THEY* are always watching us. He is saying that they are a a cloud of *witnesses*.

These men and women are witnesses in the covenantal sense. Their lives testified to the faithfulness of God. Hebrews 11 is a record. Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Sarah, Moses, and the prophets all stand as sworn testimony that God can be trusted, always.

I'm frustrated when I hear Christians talk as if we are the center of the universe. They try to talk like these are a crowd of witnesses to OUR lives. We are not the focus here, this great cloud of witnesses are witnesses of God.

Every figure in Hebrews 11 shares one defining trait. They lived completely oriented toward a reality that they couldn't see.

*"By faith he (Abraham) sojourned in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, fellow heirs of the same promise, for he was looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God,"* (Heb 11:9-10).

*"By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing to be mistreated with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, regarding the reproach of Christ (Messiah) greater riches than the treasures of Egypt; for he was looking to the reward."* (Heb 11:24-26).

This is where Hebrews begins to train us to think differently. The cloud of witnesses should pull our attention upward and backward. Upward toward Heaven. Backward toward a long history of witnesses who fixed their eyes upon the Messiah and His Kingdom.

Notice what Hebrews 11 says repeatedly. By faith they obeyed. By faith they endured. By faith they suffered. By faith they did not receive what was promised, yet they greeted it from afar. These witnesses lived with a forward-looking faith that reached beyond their moment in history. They understood themselves as characters in a story larger than their own lifespan.

This is a cosmic way of thinking. Hebrews 11 refuses an earthbound imagination. It insists that faith is fixed on Heaven. The saints were not living for comfort, security, or even immediate vindication. They were running their races with their eyes fixed on the Messiah. They oriented their lives around promises that could only be fulfilled by God acting decisively in history.

Hebrews 11 prepares us to hear Hebrews 12. Before we are told to run, we are shown that the race has always been run this way. By faith in Christ.

## **II. Heb 12:1b**

After lifting our eyes to the cloud of witnesses, the author of Hebrews immediately turns our attention inward. If the race is to be run with endurance, then something must be removed.

*“Therefore since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, laying aside every weight and the sin which so easily entangles us, let us run with endurance the race that is set before us”*

When Hebrews tells us to lay aside every weight, the author is assuming something fundamental about the Christian life. Faithful obedience to God will not happen accidentally, endurance won't be automatic. Faith must be trained, that training begins with having the right direction. Before we deal with sin, we must deal with the orientation of our lives.

This is where the language of Proverbs becomes essential. Proverbs 4:25-27 commands, *“Let your eyes look directly ahead and even let your eyelids be fixed straight in front of you. Watch the track of your feet And all your eyes will be established. Do not turn to the right nor to the left; Turn your foot from evil.”* Scripture consistently treats the eyes as the governors of the soul. What we look at determines where we walk. What we fix our attention upon shapes our lives.

Hebrews is teaching the same thing. To lay aside weights is to remove whatever distracts the gaze and slows our forward movement. In Proverbs, wandering eyes lead to wandering feet. In Hebrews, divided focus leads to spiritual exhaustion.

These weights in Hebrews 12:1 may not even be something inherently sinful, but as Pastor Scott always says, “a good desire becomes a bad desire when it becomes a ruling desire”. In the ancient world, a runner would strip away everything that could slow him down.

Clothing, excess gear, even hair could be cut. There's nothing immoral about any of those things, but on the racetrack, those things could ruin your race. We need to strip ourselves of all ruling desires.

Paul uses this same language across the New Testament (which is one reason why so many think this is one of Paul's sermons). In Romans 13:12 he says, *"The night is almost gone, and the day is at hand. Therefore let us lay aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armour of light."* To you understand Paul's logic here? Look at where history is headed, the dawn is approaching, and because of that, certain things no longer fit. It's time to dress for daylight. Get up out of bed and put on your clothes, it's almost morning, that's what Paul's saying. Our eschatology should drive us.

In 1 Corinthians 9:24 Paul uses the same sports analogy (sounds like my dad). *"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."* Runners compete to win, no athlete trains casually. The prize requires self-control in all things. The athlete must deny himself because the goal is worth it.

The Christian life is shaped by what we behold. In 2Co 3:18, Paul says *"But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit."* What dominates our attention eventually determines our likeness.

This is why Hebrews speaks of laying aside weights. Paul frames the same thing in 2Co 7:1 when he writes, *"Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God."* Holiness, true holiness, requires a process of intentionally separating yourself from everything that pollutes your focus on God.

In Colossians 3:8, Paul commands believers to put off anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk. These are the sinful habits that we must lay aside.

### **III. RUNNING WITH ENDURANCE: THE SHAPE OF FAITHFUL OBEDIENCE (Heb 12:1C)**

Hebrews 12:1 ends by saying, *"let us run with endurance the race that is set before us."* Is the course, or terrain, or length, or timing of a race determined by the runner? No, our race is set before us by God Himself.

This is why endurance is the virtue the author is focusing on here. If we designed our own races, the author would be telling us to make the right choices to make them less difficult. Shouldn't we use our free will to make life easier for ourselves? Does that make sense if the race has already been set by God, hardship is part of His design to sanctify us.

Hebrews 11 prepares us for this truth. Did Abraham choose to live his life of wandering? No! He obeyed a call from a God he had never heard of, that uprooted him from his secure life, and he spent the rest of his life living in tents, waiting for a city he never saw. His race included decades of delay, unanswered questions, and deferred fulfillment. Scripture says he lived by faith. Abraham trusted in the God who set his course.

Moses' race was no less sovereignly determined. Hebrews 11 tells us that he left Egypt not because he feared Pharaoh, but because he regarded the reproach of the Messiah as greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt. Moses chose suffering because he trusted the God who set the race before him. He understood that the covenant promises of God were bound up with the coming Messiah. Moses ran his race with his eyes fixed on a future glory that outweighed everything in the world.

#### **IV. FIXING OUR EYES ON JESUS: THE HEART OF CHRISTOTELIC THINKING (Heb 12:2a)**

This brings us to the most important command in this passage, Hebrews 12:2 says *“fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith”*. This is the imperative in Hebrews 12. Everything that comes before this phrase builds up to it, and everything that follows flows from it.

To fix one's eyes is an act of intention. The Greek language here implies a sustained, deliberate focus. It means to have a single point of orientation, and refusing to be distracted by anything else.

The reason our gaze must remain fixed on Jesus is because He is the *“author and perfecter of faith”*. Hebrews 5:8-9 say earlier in this book, *“Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered. And having been made perfect, He became to all those who obey Him the source of eternal salvation”*.

Paul writes in Phil. 1:6 *“For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus”*. We see in Scripture that Jesus initiates our faith, and perfects it, bringing it to its intended end. Faith is always moving toward a goal. What Christ begins, He completes.

Think of the great comfort this would have been to the original audience, to these weary believers. Perhaps some weary Christian heard this letter first read out loud and asked, “how can I endure?” though; but then they hear that the same Christ who calls them to endure is actively at work ensuring that their faith will reach its appointed destination.

I love the idea of fixing our eyes on Jesus, because if we think Biblically, who else would we be looking to? Paul writes in Col 1:16-20

*“For in Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created*

*through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, And in Him all things hold together. And He is the head of the body, the church; Who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything. For in Him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, And through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross—through Him—whether things on earth or things in heaven.”*

Psalm 110:1 says, “YHWH says to my Lord: ‘Sit at My **right hand** Until I put Your enemies as a footstool for Your feet.’” This verse quoted throughout Hebrews, because this verse shows where the race leads. The one we fix our eyes on is already seated. Everything ends with Christ at the throne. Jesus is no longer running, He has already won. His enthronement guarantees the outcome of the race for those united to Him. This is the heart of Christotelic thinking. We run because our King has already won.

#### **V. THE CROSS AND THE JOY SET BEFORE HIM (Heb 12:2b)**

Hebrews 12:2 continues by saying “*who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame*”. What an awesome window into the mind of the Son of God. Think of that phrase “for the joy set before Him”. Jesus knew the joy set before Him, He was certain of it. He knew God’s redemptive purposes would be fulfilled. Jesus endured because He knew where the path led. The cross was a necessary path Jesus had to take toward the outcome.

Jesus endured crucifixion knowing that through His obedience, Adam’s sin would be dealt with and the powers that had enslaved humanity would be put to shame. The joy set Him was the joy of being the propitiation for our sins, and reconciling us as a redeemed people to God.

Jesus let Himself be scourged, spat upon, and nailed to a tree because He fixed His eyes on the throne. He knew that His obedience would lead to His exaltation and the renewal of all things.

Think also about the words “endured the cross, despising the same”. To understand the weight of these words, we must grasp the nature of Roman crucifixion. Crucifixion was designed to degrade as much as to kill. It was a public spectacle meant to strip a person of all dignity, honour, and identity. Victims were naked, mocked, and displayed as warnings to not break Rome’s law.

Jesus endured the dismantling of His dignity. Yet Hebrews says He despised the shame. When writing this, I wasn’t sure how to put this idea into words. Thankfully, I don’t have to, because Jesus quoted Psalm 22 on the cross, Ps 22:1 says “*My God, my God, why have You forsaken me?*” Read with me verses 6-8 of that psalm, “*But I am a worm and not a man, A reproach of men and despised by the people. All who see me mock me; They smack*

*their lip, they wag their head, saying, ‘Commit yourself to YHWH; let Him rescue him; Let Him deliver him, because He delights in him.’*

If that doesn't pain you to read, I'm not done. Psalm 69:7-9 say *Because for Your sake I have borne reproach; Dishonour has covered my face. I have become estranged from my brothers and a foreigner to my mother's sons. For zeal for Your house has consumed me, and the reproaches of those who reproach You have fallen on me*". Jesus' life was marked by this zeal, that verse is even quoted when Jesus cleanses the temple. He confronted hypocrisy, yet despite His sinlessness, look at verses 19-21 of this psalm *"You know my reproach and my shame and my dishonor; All my adversaries are before You. Reproach has broken my heart and I am so sick. And I hoped for sympathy, but there was none, And for comforters, but I found none."* Who is this sufferer, who is this talking about? Verse 21 writes, *"They also gave me gall for my food And for my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink."* It's Jesus on the cross, he was given sour wine on Calvary when he was thirsty. Christ hoped for sympathy, but there was none. He looked for comforters, but He found none.

This was the shame that Jesus bore willingly. He despised this shame but chose to endure it. Yet through all this, do you want to hear something awesome? Look at Isaiah 50:6-7, *"I gave my back to those who strike Me, and My cheeks to those who pluck out the beard; I did not hide My face from dishonour and spitting. Even now Lord YHWH helps Me, Therefore, I am not dishonoured; Therefore, I have set My face like flint, And I know that I will not be ashamed."* Jesus offered His body to be struck, yet HE was resolute, because He was confident that God would vindicate Him.

Look at what the Father says about His Son in Isaiah 52:13 and following, *"Behold, My Servant will prosper; He will be high and lifted up and greatly exalted. Just as many were appalled at you, My people, So His appearance was marred **MORE THAN ANY MAN** And His form more than the sons of men."* Isaiah 53 says He bears griefs, carries our sorrows, and was pierced for our sins. His suffering is substitutionary, and through it, many are justified.

It is because of what these Scriptures say that Hebrews can say Jesus endured the cross, and despised the shame. He did so because of the joy set before Him.

## **VI. ENTHRONEMENT (Heb 12:2c)**

Hebrews 12:2 does not end at the cross though. After telling us that Jesus endured the cross and despised its shame, the author declares that He *"sat down at the right hand of the throne of God."* This final clause is the key that gives meaning to everything that came before it.

### **A. "Sat down at the right hand of the throne of God"**

To say that Jesus sat down is to declare that His work is complete. Sitting signifies rest, authority, and accomplished purpose. The priest stood daily to offer sacrifices that could never fully deal with sin. Christ, having offered Himself once for all, sits. IT. IS. FINISHED.

The location of that seat matters, too. The right hand of the throne of God is the place of supreme honor and authority. It is the fulfillment of Psalm 110:1, where the Lord invites His anointed to rule until every enemy is subdued. The crucified one is now the reigning one. The one who bore the weight of our sin now bears the weight of ruling Creation.

The rest of the New Testament echoes this. Revelation 1:5-6 declares Jesus *“the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To Him who loves us and released us from our sins by His blood – and He has made us to be a kingdom, priests to His God and Father – to Him be the glory and the might forever and ever. Amen.”*

## VII. CONSIDER HIM (Heb 12:3)

Hebrews 12:3 brings this thought, this idea, to a close, *“For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you will not grow weary, fainting in heart.”* What does that Greek word consider mean? Well, the Greek word that we’ve translated as “consider” is analogizomai, and it carries the sense of weighing something fully, or reasoning a thought through to its proper conclusion. It was a term used in accounting in the ancient world. The author is essentially urging believers to calculate the full cost and weight of Christ’s endurance, and to view your own suffering in light of His suffering.

When we do this properly, we shouldn’t *“grow weary, fainting in heart”*. The inverse then is also true, when believers stop considering Christ, and weighing out His suffering, and Christ’s endurance through it, when you *stop* doing that, you will grow weary, and fatigued.

What does it look like to consider Him? Hebrews is very specific here. It doesn’t say to look only at His teachings, or miracles, look also at His endurance under hostility. Jesus endured so much suffering from sinners. He didn’t just go misunderstood, He was resisted at every point of His life, rejected by the vast majority of people around Him, and then condemned to death by the very people who were chanting “Hosanna, Son of David” a week before. An artist/author I really love named Shai Linne once described what Christ endured as “the violence of humanity at its finest”.

The Gospels show us what this endurance looked like. In Luke 22:39-46, we are taken to Gethsemane. There we see Jesus under the weight of everything that is laid ahead of Him. He is deeply distressed for it, He wasn’t detached from the situation at all. His prayer shows how truly human He is, He asked His Father if the cup could pass from Him, yet right after that He put all of His distress and fear aside and said “Not my will, but Yours

be done”. Did Jesus endure because the suffering was easy for Him? He is God after all? No, He endured because obedience mattered infinitely more to Him than relief.

John 12:27-33 offers another window into this same struggle. Jesus openly says that His soul is troubled. He also speaks though, of the hour of His glorification, and declares that through His death the ruler of this world will be judged.

Are you burnt out? Has your ministry, or relationships, or circumstances which you can't control, made you fatigued and weary? This passage is telling you to redirect your gaze. Consider Him, look to Jesus. If the difficulties in your life are intensifying, and all you're seeking is anything for encouragement, God's Word requires that you shift your attention away from yourself, others, and your circumstances, look to Christ alone. Don't hear what I'm not saying, I'm not saying that your fatigue is nothing, and it's something to brush off. But God's Word offers the only true way out.

You must understand, following Christ means you have to experience opposition, pain, suffering, and rejection. Having hardships in your life isn't evidence that you've failed God, or that God has abandoned you. Difficulty in your life shows that God is lovingly disciplining you like the perfect Father He is. His discipline will result in righteousness.

Jesus is the supreme example of faith. He authored it, He completes it. He endured hostility, shame, and death with a joyful perseverance, and it resulted in Him being exulted to the right hand of the Father.

### **VIII. ESCHATOLOGICAL HOPE: THE END OF THE RACE (Revelation 7; 22)**

So, in closing, these verses in Hebrews have taught us to run, to endure, to fix our eyes, and to consider Christ. Now, I want to give one last exhortation to all of you. Lift your eyes to the finish line. Endurance only makes sense when there is an end worth reaching. The Christian race doesn't have laps, we don't reach the finish line and keep going another time around. The race ends, and the book of Revelation shows us where.

In Revelation 7, John is given a vision of the end of the race. He says,

*“After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could count, from every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, and palm branches were in their hands;” (v. 9)*

*“These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and they washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. For this reason, they are before the throne of God, and they serve Him day and night in His sanctuary; and He who sits on the throne will dwell over them. They will hunger no longer, nor thirst anymore; nor will the Sun beat down on them, nor any heat; for the Lamb at the center of the throne will shepherd them and will guide them to the spring of the water of life. And God will wipe every tear from their eyes.” (v. 14-17)*

Did these people avoid suffering? No, they have come out of the great tribulation. Their victory is achieved by remaining faithful through suffering. They stand before the throne because these saints persevered. The race brought them through affliction to the end.

Now they're clothed in white robes, and God Himself shelters them. Hunger, thirst, scorching heat, and tears are no more.

If Revelation 7 shows us the gathered people of God, Revelation 22 shows us the world we inherit. John is shown a vision of the new creation. He sees the river of the water of life flowing from the throne. What is he seeing? He is seeing the Garden of Eden restored, now expanded and secured forever. The tree of life is still there, bearing fruit for the healing of the nations. The curse is gone. Decay and death have been undone. God's servants see His face, and His name is on their foreheads.

This is the glorious hope that we have at the end of the race. This hope is captured with awesome beauty in the closing lines of C.S. Lewis' *The Last Battle*. *The Last Battle* is the final volume of the Chronicles of Narnia, which for those who don't know, is a series of books that are allegories of the Gospel. At the very end, C.S. Lewis writes this as the main characters enter Aslan's (Jesus') Country, he writes on page 228.

*“And for us this is the end of all the stories, and we can most truly say that they all lived happily ever after. But for them it was only the beginning of the real story. All their life in this world and all their adventures in Narnia had only been the cover and the title page; now at last they were beginning Chapter One of the Great Story which no one on earth has read: which goes on for ever: in which every chapter is better than the one before”* (Lewis, 1956, p. 228).

This life, with all its suffering and endurance, is not the story. It is the title page. The race ends with the Great Story beginning. When we fix our eyes on Jesus, we are running toward a Kingdom that will never fade, a creation fully restored, and a Great Story that will never end.

Let's pray,  
*Heavenly Father,*

*Sovereign Lord of Heaven and earth,  
We thank You for Your Son, Christ Jesus,  
The Author and Perfecter of our faith,  
the One through whom all things were made  
and toward whom all things move.  
Thank You that He endured the cross for the joy set before Him,  
that He despised the shame,  
and that He now sits at Your right hand,*

*reigning until every enemy is placed beneath His feet.*

*Father, teach us to fix our eyes on Your Son.*

*Strip us of every weight that slows us down, and every sin that entangles us.*

*Give us the grace to run with endurance the race You have set before us.*

*Teach us to consider Christ. Remind us of Gethsemane, remind us of the cross.*

*Let us live with Christ at the center of our thinking, and the meaning of our lives.*

*Father may we persevere in our faith until the day our race is finished, and we stand before the throne of the Lamb, to reign with Him forever.*

*We ask all of this in the name of Jesus Christ, our High Priest and King*

*Amen*