



Hebrews 12:1-3

Looking unto Jesus in the Race of Life

"Christ in you the hope of glory" is the essence of the Christian life.

Christianity is being conformed in the image of God's Son, Jesus Christ.

It is constantly "looking unto Jesus" trustfully, submissively, lovingly. It is a heart occupied with, and a mind stayed on Him.

Genuine Christianity is a life lived in communion with Christ. The living Christ must be the passion and reality of our souls. He must be in possession of all we are. "For me to live is Christ." "Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by faith of the Son of God" (Galatians 2:20).

Christianity is Christ living in me and through me to His glory. The secret of our own intimate personal relationship with the Lord is a personal experience with the crucified and resurrected Christ.

Our sufficiency to live the Christian life is found in "Jesus Christ [who] is the same yesterday and today and forever" (Hebrews 13:8).

The writer of Hebrews regarded the Christian life as an endurance race, a marathon, not a 50-yard dash. The successful runner always keeps his eyes on the goal. The runner in the race of life must keep his eyes focused on Jesus Christ or he stumbles and falls.

"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. For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart" (Hebrews 12:1-3, NASB95). All Scripture quoted are from New American Standard Bible 1995 Update unless otherwise noted.

Christians today have a great multitude of glorious examples of enduring faith in God.

Great Examples of Enduring Faith in the Race of Life

The context is Hebrews chapter eleven. The emphasis is on the testimonies of these great Old Testament saints who bore witness to the faithfulness of God. The runners in chapter twelve are to look at them rather than these faithful witnesses looking upon the runners. It is not what they see in us, but what we see in them that is stressed. A. B. Davidson says, "They surround us as a cloud, and we realize their presence, without supposing that they are conscious of us."

"Great cloud of witnesses"

The "cloud of witnesses" is a common metaphor for a large number of people. This vast multitude of witnesses are unquestionably the countless heroes of faith in Hebrews eleven who bear witness, and testify to the fact of God having fulfilled all of His promises in the person and work of Jesus Christ. He is the one who is greater than the angels, the prophets, Moses, the old covenant, the high priest, the sacrifices, etc. They bore "witness" (*marturon*) to what they personally knew. These witnesses are not passive, and they are not silent. They speak to us through the pages of the Old Testament. They cheer us on through their testimonies as we read them. Their biblical voices encourage us to run the race. Their experiences stand as a testimony to us as to what pleases God. They are examples of the enduring faith of men and women who believe in God. The word acquired its distinctive sense of the Christian "martyr."

Nothing can be drawn from this passage as to the relation between the living and the dead. There is simply no evidence anywhere in the Scriptures that the dead are watching us. The context is these Old Testament saints gave witness to God at work in their lives. Many of them were faithful unto death. They sealed their testimonies as martyrs. The main idea is that believers today should be encouraged and stimulated by their examples of faith.

Lay aside every Obstacle to Run the Race of Life

"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" (ESV).

"Every encumbrance"

"Lay aside every weight" (ESV). The word is *ogkon*, meaning "mass," "weight" or "burden" "impediment," and in the athletic world meant the bulk of unnecessary bodyweight that needed to be removed by the right exercise in training before the race. At the time of the contest the Greek contestants were required to be stripped naked. Metaphorically it means anything that would hinder the runner in the spiritual race.

"Lay aside" (*apothemenoi*) or "rid oneself of" or "putting off from one's self" suggests something thrown off like a garment, which is anything that would be a hindrance to the runner. Let us strip for the race, says the writer. It could be anything good or bad as long as it impedes the runner. Get rid of any and every hindrance to the Christian life. Get rid of everything that is in the way. Remove anything that you would stumble or trip over. All that does not help hinders the spiritual runner. We must get rid even of innocent things that keep us from running the best way possible.

"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. 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" (1 Corinthians 9:24-27). Paul had a fear of running in vain (Gal. 2:2).

There are many obstructions in the Christian life which unless they are removed will impede our progress. The Christian runner must throw off everything that would be a hindrance to his winning the race. Anything that would hold us back must come off. We are to lay aside every kind of weight, any and every hindrance that would weigh us down. What are the things in your life that impede your running the race?

The "sin which so easily entangles us"

The word *euperistaton* translated "easily entangles us" is found only here in the New Testament. It probably does not refer to one particular kind of sin, but the unique characteristic of all sin which continually surrounds men and easily gets a hold on them. Sin is an ever present threat to the Christian's ability to run the race. English Standard Version reads, "sin which clings so closely." Sin is sticky. Once you do it, it is hard to let go. There is tenacity about sin which makes it cling to the sinner. It is a heavy impediment between man and God.

"Every sin to which we cling" is grammatically possible but it does not fit the context well. It is best to translate "sin which so easily entangles us" or "sin which clings so closely."

Whatever kind of sin impedes or slows down the Christian in the spiritual race needs to be removed. Anything, however innocent in itself, can become an obstacle in the race just like a long flowing garment would impede the runner in a race. What is it in your spiritual life that keeps you from keeping your eyes focused on Jesus Christ?

"Run with Endurance" the Race of Life

"Endurance" (*hupomone*) or perseverance or patient endurance is called for when we are under intense pressure or persecution. It is translated "patience, endurance, fortitude, steadfastness, perseverance."

"But flee from these things, you man of God, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, perseverance and gentleness. Fight the good fight of faith; take hold of the eternal life to which you were called, and you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses" (1 Timothy 6:11-12).

We are dependent upon the Holy Spirit who lives within us to win the race (Gal. 5:16-25; Rom. 7:14-25).

Here is how the apostle Paul ran the race: "More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ, and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith, that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death; in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead" (Philippians 3:8-11).

The main exhortation in the passage is let us like that great cloud of witnesses run with patience the race God has set before us. "The present imperative implies that the readers have been and are now running and calls on them to keep on more strenuously than ever," notes R. C. Lenski.

God has set before us the goal in race.

God Himself has set our work and our prize before us. We can thank Him that it is not ours to choose, but the one who knows what is best for us has made that choice on our behalf. The goal is Christ-likeness, "that we may share His holiness" (v. 10). It involves our sanctification (cf. 2 Pet. 1:4-7; Rom. 8:28-30; Col. 1:27-29). When Christ comes we will have the joy and "have cause to glory" because we "did not run in vain nor toil in vain" (Phil. 2:16).

We are engaged in an utmost serious contest that is not in the realm of time, but has eternal consequences.

The Judge of the contest is seated at the right hand of the Father.

Run the Race of Life by fixing our eyes only on Jesus

In the race of faith we must keep constantly before our eyes Him who is the author and perfecter of faith. The gaze of faith is focused on Jesus who has fulfilled all of the promises of God.

"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" (ESV).

"Fixing our eyes on Jesus"

"Looking to Jesus" (ESV) (*aphorao*) "looking away from" all that distracts and "looking to, focusing attention on Jesus" (*eis Iesous*). B. F. Westcott noted it is "not only at the first moment, but constantly during the whole struggle." The idea is looking away from our hindrances and keeping our gaze fixed upon Jesus. We have eyes for no one except Jesus. Jesus is always near and in sight to those who have spiritual eyes. Therefore, success depends on fixing our gaze upon Him.

Jesus is the supreme example of faith in God. He takes the lead and sets the example worth following. When we look over the Hall of Fame of Faith in Hebrews eleven Jesus is completely set apart from them. In Jesus alone we see absolute dependence on God. They are followers, He is the leader. Jesus had implicit trust in His Father. In Him we see the complete perfection of faith.

"Author and Perfecter of our faith"

Jesus is the *archegon*, i.e., the "originator," "founder," "leader," "pathfinder" and "pioneer" (Acts 3:15; 5:31; Heb. 2:10; 12:2). Jesus is the pioneer or trailblazer to whom we focus on in the race (2 Cor. 3:18). In Jesus faith has reached its perfection when He endured the cross and cried out "It is finished."

Albert Barnes observed that Jesus "is the first and the last as an example of faith, or of confidence in God. . . . He is at the head of all those who have furnished an example of confidence in God, for He was Himself the most illustrious instance of it. . . . He occupies the elevated position of being beyond comparison above all others in this respect." What a great God and Savior we have!

As a Leader Jesus precedes others by His example of faith. We follow Him. He perfected faith and is the supreme example of faith.

Jesus is the Perfecter or Completer (*teleiotes*) of our faith. He has gone before us as the trailblazer and completed the course.

Many translators have rendered "the one who goes ahead of us and causes our faith in God to be what it should be" or "and makes perfect our confidence in God" or "the one who makes it possible for us to trust in God, and also to keep on trusting in Him." Our confidence in God has always been and will always be because of Jesus. (Ellingworth, P., & Nida, E. A. *Translator's Handbook on the Letter to the Hebrews*).

Moreover, Jesus alone stimulates and evokes our faith. Jesus is the source or origin of our faith. He is the originator of Christian faith within the believer. He initiated and sustained it. He is the completer or finisher who has gone before us and has completed the course. He is waiting for us in heaven (John 14:1-3; 1 John 3:1-3). "This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, a hope both sure and steadfast and one which enters within the veil, where Jesus has entered as a forerunner for us, having become a high priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek" (Hebrews 6:19-20).

"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" (Philippians 1:6). "Christ starts our faith and leads it to its consummation," writes Lenski. "Christ is the One who causes and completes the faith of believers." Christ is "the source and the goal of our faith."

Jesus is perfect example of a life lived by faith.

Jesus is the man of faith *par excellence*. His entire earthly life was the embodiment of trust and total dependence on the Father. He perfectly fulfilled the will of God. Jesus said, "Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, unless it is something He sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, these things the Son also does in like manner. For the Father loves the Son, and shows Him all things that He Himself is doing; and the Father will show Him greater works than these, so that you will marvel" (John 5:19-20). Then he said, "I can do nothing on My own initiative. As I hear, I judge; and My judgment is just, because I do not seek My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me" (John 5:30).

It was an act of faith when Jesus offered His body "once for all for sins for all time and sat down at the right hand of God waiting for the day when His enemies be made a footstool for His feet. "For by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified" (Heb. 10:14). Because Jesus was faithful to the will of His Father "we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He inaugurated for us through the veil, that is, His flesh" (Heb. 10:20). Now "we can draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water" (v. 22). Because Jesus was faithful He became "the source of eternal salvation to all who obey Him" (Heb. 5:9).

Because He was faithful, Jesus "is uniquely qualified to be the supplier and sustainer of the faith of His followers," notes Philip Hughes. He is not ashamed to call us His brethren. He sustains us by His presence, and empowers us by His indwelling Spirit. "We run toward the prize of everlasting salvation and glory which he won for us through His death on the cross."

Jesus' goal in the race

Jesus endured the cross "for the joy set before Him." It is "for" (*anti*) "in view of the joy" or "because of the joy" or "for the sake of the joy set before Him." His focus is on the prospect of final victory when His redemptive work is completed. The accomplished fact is He sat down at the right hand of the throne of God in heaven.

"Joy set before Him"

The joy is completing the work of our salvation. It is the joy of glorifying the Father. When Jesus said, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified" (John 12:23) He was speaking of His death. By glorified He meant crucifixion. His glorification is one continuous movement of which His crucifixion, resurrection, and

ascension are phases. "Father, glorify Your name.' Then a voice came out of heaven: 'I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again'" (John 12:28).

The joy of Jesus is also the joy of the elect of God. It is the Father's will that the joy of Jesus dwell in us who believe in Him. Jesus said, "These things I have spoken to you so that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be made full" (John 15:11). It is the joy of heaven when a sinner repents and believes on Christ. We have yet to enter into the joy that is ours in Christ for all eternity.

The road to joy was by way of the cross. The joy would come in the day of His triumph. It was joy as a reward of His suffering on the cross. Phillips paraphrases, "because of the joy He knew would follow His suffering." It was the joy that was awaiting Him. Westcott observed, "The joy was that of the work of redemption accomplished through self-sacrifice." He enjoys the eternal sonship in heaven where "He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high." "He endured . . . and has sat down." Suffering is wholly in the past, but the issue of it abides for evermore. Look at what He accomplished through His patiently enduring the cross.

Jesus "endured the cross"

Jesus exchanged the glory of His divine nature for the humility of a servant. He endured the cross. The vicarious penal atonement was absolutely central to the purpose of His coming to this earth (Matt. 16:21). This is a constant theme in the gospels. God laid out the path of suffering for Jesus (Isa. 53:4-6; Acts 2:22-23), and filled Him with joy at his exaltation in glory when He completed the race (Acts 2:14, 28, 33-36).

He "endured (*hupomeno*) the cross, despising the shame." The idea is to remain under, instead of fleeing and to stand one's ground, to hold out, endure in time of trouble, affliction and persecution. There was nothing more shameful and disgraceful than suffering public crucifixion. It was even more horrid for a Jewish person. There was no lower level of humiliation (Gal. 3:13; Deu. 21:23). It was reserved for the vilest of criminals and lowest of social outcast in the Roman Empire. Jesus did not allow this humiliation to stand between Him and loyalty to doing the will of God (Phil. 2:6-8). Jesus felt the "shame" of the cross. What men count as shame Jesus counted as glory.

"For Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, so that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit" (1 Peter 3:18). The message of the cross is the power of God unto salvation to all who believe (Rom. 1:16-17; 1 Cor. 1:18, 23-24).

Hebrews 12:3 says Jesus "endured such hostility by sinners against Himself." This "hostility" (*antilogian*) denotes all kinds of hostility in word and deed. This is the concentrated hostility of evil. It is summed up in the cruelty of the cross (Acts 2:2-24; 3:13-15).

Sometimes I have people tell me they do not believe in the Biblical view of the depravity of man. They have never taken a real look at themselves. The cross of Jesus exposes the total, radical depravity of the human heart. The sinner is dead in trespasses and sins. He cannot respond to God until the Holy Spirit reveals the true condition of his heart and brings spiritual regeneration. The human heart is wicked without Christ. Observe the attitude of the world toward Jesus Christ.

Jesus was crowned in glory

The day of His joy and glory arrived when He "sat down at the right hand of the throne of God." Jesus was exalted to the highest place of dignity and honor in the universe. His heavenly session is a permanent reality today (Psa. 110:1; Heb. 1:3; 8:1; 10:12; 12:2). Jesus "sat down at the right hand of the throne of God." "Sat down" is in the perfect tense indicating the action that happened in the past has continuing effects or results in the present and future time.

The book of Hebrews begins with this theme and ends on it (Heb. 1:3; 2:9; 4:14; 5:5-10; 6:19-20; 7:26-28; 8:1; 9:11-12, 24, 28; 10:12; 12:2; 13:20). Cf. John 10:11, 17-18; Acts 2:24, 33; 3:15; 1 Pet. 1:21; Eph. 4:10; Phil. 2:8-11).

The believer is also associated with the power of the resurrection (Phil. 3:10; Rom. 6:5; Col. 2:12-13; 3:1-4; Eph. 2:5-7).

"Consider Him"

If you keep your focus on Jesus "you will not grow weary and lose heart."

"Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted" (ESV).

"Consider Him," make a careful reckoning by comparing Jesus and your suffering. "Consider" (*analogizomai*) means think over, consider thoughtfully, and ponder the suffering of Jesus for you. The author wants the readers to comparing Christ's sufferings with the readers' own less severe persecutions.

"Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day. For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal" (2 Corinthians 4:16-18).

How are you running the race of life?

During the race the apostle Paul said, "But I do not consider my life of any account as dear to myself, so that I may finish my course and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify solemnly of the gospel of the grace of God" (Acts 20:24). The he came to the end of the race and could write: "For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith; in the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing" (2 Timothy 4:6-8).

Jesus sets the example of looking by faith. He is the author, file leaders, captain, and pioneer of our faith. He perfected our faith in the sense that He finished His course of living by faith successively. He is the perfecter of our faith because He is the one in whom faith has reached its perfection. He alone is the source of our hope and help in time of need.

What happens when we do not keep our eyes on Jesus?

Like Peter walking on water we sink if our eyes are not focused on Jesus (Matt. 14:22-33).

Stephen looked upon Jesus in the hour of his martyrdom. "But being full of the Holy Spirit, he gazed intently into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God; and he said, "Behold, I see the heavens opened up and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God. . . They went on stoning Stephen as he called on the Lord and said, 'Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!'" (Acts 7:55-56, 59). Stephen won the race.

I can shout with excitement, "No Other Song have I to Sing but Jesus." I can illustrate this enthusiasm with this quote of C. H. Spurgeon on Christ. Listen to the pulse beat of this man of God.

"I believe that whenever our religion is most vital, it is most full of Christ. . . . I can bear witness that whenever I am in deeps of sorrow, nothing will do for me but 'Jesus only.' . . . I retreat to the innermost citadel of our holy faith, namely, to the very heart of Christ, when my spirit is assailed by temptation, or besieged with sorrow and anguish. What is more, my witness is that whenever I have high spiritual enjoyments, enjoyments rich, rare, celestial, they are always connected with Jesus only. . . The sublimest, the most inebriating, the most divine of all joys, must be found in Jesus only. . . I find if I want to labor much, I must live on Jesus only; if I desire to suffer patiently, I must feed on Jesus only; if I wish to wrestle with God successfully, I must plead Jesus only; if I aspire to conquer sin, I must use the blood of Jesus only; if I pant to learn the mysteries of heaven, I must seek the teachings of Jesus only. I believe that anything which we add to Christ lowers our position, and that the more elevated our soul becomes, the more nearly like what it is to be when it shall enter into the region of the perfect, the more completely everything else will sink, die out, and Jesus, Jesus, Jesus only, will be the first and the last. . . . (C. H. Spurgeon, *Sermons of C. H. Spurgeon of London*, Vol. 9 (N. Y.: Funk & Wagnalls Co., n. d.), pp. 433-434).

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