**LET US FIX OUR EYES ON JESUS**

July 5, 2015

Hebrews 12:1-4

Key Verse 12:2 “fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.”

Life is lived in the lanes of one of two races. The first race is commonly known as the Rat Race. This race is defined by the Oxford dictionary as: “a way of life in which people are caught up in a fiercely competitive struggle for wealth or power.” In this race the runners are only concerned with themselves. By cheating if necessary, they will make a great effort to succeed. The other race is the Faith Race. It is the Christian life. The Christian runs this race not with the attitude of struggling to finish first but instead, we run struggling to persevere. We want to finish our race. Thousands of marathoners seem to enjoy punishing themselves in those grueling races. What is their hope of winning? It is very slim. Someone said, “The real joy of the Boston Marathon is just finishing, just winning the contest with yourself-doing what you set out to do.” Achieving their goal of finishing the full course of 26.2 miles (42.195 km) motivates them to run the race to the end. Likewise we want to cross the finish line and hear Jesus say, “Well done, my good and faithful servant.”

The problem for many Christians is that we often switch tracks midweek and sometimes multiple times in the day. We run the Faith Race on Sunday and come Monday morning we are in the Rat Race. Sometimes we try not to run in either of them because it is too tiring. Which race are you running? What are your faith-race goals? The author of Hebrews sets Jesus as our example to follow in our spiritual faith race. All Christians look to Jesus as their example as they face the difficulties involved in living out their faith. Let’s fix our eyes on Jesus as our goal of faith race and endure all kinds of hardships until we finish the race. May God bless us to run the faith race with perseverance!

Look at verse 1. “Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sins that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.” The life of faith has been fully attested by this great cloud of Old Testament witnesses in chapter 11. Abraham cheers on us when we obey God’s calling facing uncertain futures. Moses cheers on us when we choose God’s reward rather than the worldly reward. The story of crossing the Red Sea by the people of faith pumps our hearts and we are moved by the mighty power of God demonstrated to the people of faith. We are greatly encouraged to run the race because we are surrounded by such a great clouds of witnesses who are cheering us in the side lines. We are not alone in our faith race.

God revealed his glory through men and women of faith in the past so that they might worship him. Now it is our turn. How can we run the faith race? Apostle Paul said at the end of his faith race, “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.” (2 Tim 4:7) Paul’s life goal was to finish the race. Some people give up their race in the midst of hardships or are tired of running the race any more. As a result, they drop out of their faith race. They will not receive the victor’s crown. We cannot make an excuse saying, “I was so close but I could not finish. I am sorry.” This will not work well. Therefore, keep your goal of faith and stick with it no matter what happens.

What is the secret of finishing our race? Verse 1b says, “Let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.” The rule number one is to throw off everything that hinders. It means to run light. Runners carry nothing with them in a race. They do not carry suit cases or bag packs with them. In Olympic Games, there is no rule against carrying food and other things. But no one does that. Because they hinder running. Here those things that hinder our race may not be necessary bad things by themselves. A campus evangelist, Stephen Lutz, said in his book, that when he was a student, he used to go to football games and cheered for his team on Saturday nights. Then on Sunday morning, he was participating in praise and worship. But as you can imagine, his voice would be dead on Sunday morning after loud cheering on Saturday. He could not praise God properly on Sundays. He prayed and decided to give up his cheering on Saturdays. We must set aside whatever hinders our faith race. We must get rid of anything we do not need. Worries of life can be the things that hinder our faith race. Laziness and easy-going life can also hinder our faith race. Bad habits that hinder our race must be purged. Therefore, we must throw off anything that hinders our race by faith.

The rule number two is to throw off sin that easily entangles us. We must throw off all kinds of sins because it entangles our race. Sin is like a spider web. A spider is an expert to entangle insects with its web. The more any insect caught in the spider web tries to come out, the more the web entangles the insect. Sin entangles our race easily. It drags down until we cannot run any more. Sin makes us confused and complicated. Sin destroys our relationship with God. Here sin is mostly sin of unbelief. Unbelief makes us doubt God’s love, and it entangles us more and more until we cannot get out. What is the solution not to be entangled by sin? We must hold on to the word of God. We must have complete trust in the promise of God and complete confidence that the life of faith is sure to win. The word of God is like a sharp double-edged sword. It will cut all entanglements.

The rule number three is to run the race with perseverance. The word “persevere or endure” is repeated in each verse from verses 1-3. Our faith is not a short 100 meter sprint. It is a long distance race. Our starting line is the moment we are born again into Jesus by the work of the Holy Spirit and our finishing line is the moment we enter into the kingdom of God. Our faith race will not end until we pass through the pearly gate in the kingdom of God and we hear Jesus saying to us, “Welcome home.” This long distance race requires perseverance and endurance. We will face steep uphill course and difficult times in our race. Do not run out of course for relaxation or break but keep on running until it is finished. Endurance is a key point in our faith race. Faithfulness is required to run the race to the end. In the marathon someone runs 25 miles and then he quits and there will be no prize. 2 Timothy 2:3 says, “Endure hardship with us like a good soldier of Christ Jesus.” Also verse 1b says, “the race marked out for us.” Each person’s race is different. One person’s race may look easy, and the other person’s race looks very difficult. But each one has his own race to run. The race of the robber on the cross was very short, lasted only a few hours. It also says that we need to run. Jesus will not run the race for us. We ourselves need to cross the finish line.

Look at verse 2. “fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.” In order to run with perseverance, the first thing we have to do is to fix our eyes on Jesus, the One who began our faith and who makes it perfect. Faith is rooted firmly in the person and work of Jesus Christ from beginning to end. Jesus himself planted the initial seed of faith within our heart by his Spirit and he will nurture and cultivate it our whole life through. What we need to understand is that it is all about Jesus! The purpose of your life is far greater than your own personal fulfillment, your peace of mind, or even your happiness. It is far greater than your family, your career, or even your wildest dreams and ambitions. If you want to know why you were placed on this planet, you must begin with Jesus. Colossians 1:16 says, “For in him all things were created: things in in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him.” In other words, it’s all about Jesus! We look to Jesus because he is the pioneer of our faith. He set the course of faith, plotted its path, and now he waits for us at the finish line encouraging us along the way and helping us to reach the goal.

Furthermore, we look only to Jesus because he alone keeps us on course. When we lose our focus on Jesus, that’s when we start having trouble. Where we fix our eyes will decide our future. If we fix our eyes on money, we will be disappointed. If we fix our eyes on video games, we will be scatter-brained. If we fix our eyes on our children, we worry about their future. If we fix our eyes on bad pictures, our eyes will be rotten. Why do we have to fix our eyes on Jesus? He is both the author and perfecter of our faith. In Hebrews 2:10, Jesus was introduced as the author of our salvation. Here he is introduced as the author of our faith. Jesus was introduced as the author of life in Acts 3:15. Jesus wrote the Bible. Bible is the story of Jesus. Jesus originated faith. Jesus pioneered the path of faith we should follow. He opened the way of faith for us to follow. He said to Levi the tax collector, “Follow me.” (Mark 2:14) Levi got up and followed Jesus. Later, he became Saint Matthew because he fixed his eyes on Jesus instead of tax money.

Look at verse 3. “Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.” The word translated ‘consider’ is the source from which we get the English word “analyze” and it means to examine in detail, to study thoroughly, to observe with precision. It is more than a passing glance or an afterthought. It is the focal point of our attention. And this must be our attitude when we think of Christ:

He is the source of all Joy
Embodiment of all Comfort
The fountain of Truth
The expression of Grace

We are called upon to focus our thoughts upon Him, to cast our gaze upon Him –Looking unto Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith. Do you want to win the race? Do you want to cross that finish line in victory? Do you want to avoid defeat? Do you want to keep from quitting part way through the marathon? The only way to do that is to Consider Him. The author is dealing with endurance. He is motivating the readers to stay in the race and not give up. The Hebrew believers were facing great persecution and immense pressure to give up on Christianity and to return to Judaism. And the author says, “Don’t Quit! Take a look at Jesus! Consider Him!” Note again verse 3: “Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.”

Jesus is the example! By the way, the primary battlefield for the Christian is in the mind. Did you note that in verse 3? Triumph or defeat is determined in the mind before the battle is even fought. That is why every thought must be brought into the submission of Christ. He says consider Him. Think about what He went through. In other words, if Jesus can be victorious, so can you. The capstone of his argument is in verse 4. He writes “In your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood.” He says, “Keep going, you’re not dead yet. Keep running you’re not dying. Keep in the race you’re still breathing!” But consider Him—Jesus died and even death could not keep Him from victory.

In Christ Jesus we have both the exemplar and the enabler! When we fix our eyes on Jesus, we can finish the race, and receive the prize. Today you are looking to one of two people. Your eyes are on yourself or your eyes are on Jesus. Let me encourage you: Consider Him! Let me conclude with a poem by an anonymous author.

Consider Him

When the storm is raging high,
When the tempest rends the sky,
When my eyes with tears are dim,
Then, my soul, consider Him.

When my plans are in the dust,
When my dearest hopes are crushed,
When is passed each foolish whim,
Then, my soul, consider Him.

When with dearest friends I part,
When deep sorrow fills my heart,
When pain racks each weary limb,
Then, my soul, consider Him.

When I track my weary way,
When fresh trials come each day,
When my faith and hope are dim,
Then, my soul, consider Him.

Clouds or sunshine, dark or bright,
Evening shades or morning light,
When my cup flows o'er the brim,
Then, my soul, consider Him.