

The Book of Hebrews – The Superiority of Christ

...God has spoken to us in His Son...(Hebrews 1:2)

Considering Christ Hebrews 12:1-3

1 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, 2 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. 3 For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

With a few personal modifications, let me begin this morning by reading to you a snippet from something I read online this past week: “For most people, when they die, it will be just as though they had never lived. They will have spent the irreplaceable energies of life in trivial discussions, inconsequential activities, and tiring pursuits of inferior goals. For them, nothing is particularly important, and no ambition stirs them beyond the lowest degree of action. For them, life is one colorless day after another which soon passes into the fog of forgetfulness and is then over. Nothing was ventured, nothing was gained. There is cause for rejoicing in nothing which they can take the trouble to remember. There are many ways to be dead while yet we live, and a purposeless, ambitionless and unfocused life is one of them.”

Now, we would all agree in theory that this is not and should not be descriptive of the life and faith of a Christian. And yet, by some, if not many, of our trivial discussions, inconsequential activities and tiring pursuits of inferior goals, do we not often betray ourselves and reveal a less than intense focus on the life of faith? Let me ask you this probing question – one that I hope you will seek to answer honestly to yourself; what are the most important things in your life? [pause]. For most, things like family, personal relationships, security and a sense of peace often find their way to the top of the list. And while there is certainly a time and place for such things, do these become encumbrances or entanglements that draw your attention away from that which is truly most important, a real, personal, vital, daily and intense relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ? Remember that Jesus Himself said that the greatest commandment was what, **“To love the Lord your God with [most of] all your heart, and with [most of] all your soul, and with [most of] all your mind.” (Matthew 22:37).** The way Jesus said it sounds real, personal, vital, daily and intense – does it not? The way Jesus said it requires something we call faith, a firm trust in the person, promises and provisions of God.

As we have studied Hebrews 11 and now find ourselves in Hebrews 12, we are discussing the life of faith, which, as we noted a couple of weeks ago, is likened unto a race which every believer is to run. In other words, the life of faith is not a way, not an option for the Christian to choose or not to choose, it is the only way. The life of faith is not ambiguously non-directional, but is decisively directional. The life of faith is not goalless and without purpose but has a clear goal and is very much purposeful. You and I are called to compete and complete the race of faith and here in Hebrews 12:1-3 we are given seven characteristics of how this race is to be run. We have already considered verse 1 which contains four of these characteristics we are to develop in our lives; namely that if we are to compete and complete the race of faith we must run...

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1. With **encouragement**, knowing that we have “**so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us**” – that is we have the reports and testimonies of vital, dynamic faith by which we might model our faith.
2. By “laying aside every **encumbrance**” – casting off even those relatively “good things” in life if they become too important to us, robbing us of being rightly focused on Christ.
3. By “laying aside” the **entanglements** of sin – casting off, avoiding and staying clear of those sins which wrap us up and trip us up.
4. With **endurance** – seeking to live out a faith that is steadfast, consistent and confident.

This morning I wish to continue this list and while I might wish on one level to complete this list of the seven characteristics of competing and completing faith, the next characteristic is so pregnant with meaning, so full of thoughts and truths to be carefully considered, that I feel it most prudent to camp out on this familiar yet abundantly more meaningful phrase than we often give appropriate consideration. Look with me at verse 2, where we note that after giving us the main action back in verse one, namely that we are to run with endurance the race which is set before us, we are given the fifth characteristic, that we must run the race focused on the excellence of Jesus. The author of Hebrews says it this way, “**fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith.**”

5. Focused on the excellencies of Jesus (12:2a)

If we are to compete and complete the race of faith, we must be “**fixing our eyes on Jesus...**” which said another way is focusing our attention on the excellencies of Jesus. Regarding this verse, the great American preacher and theologian Jonathan Edwards said that we must “*take notice of Christ’s excellence which is a...feast.*” We get to feed on the excellencies of Jesus by “**fixing our eyes**” and attention on Him. Let us consider fixing our eyes on Jesus by means of four acts.

A. A **Concerted** Act

First, fixing your eyes on Jesus is a **concerted** act – that is to say it is an act of determination and resolution to see Jesus as of primary focus and importance. What is important to you? To what do you pay the most attention? If we are to rightly live by faith, we must be “**fixing our eyes on Jesus...**” The phrase, “**fixing our eyes**” is worth fleshing out. The Greek word literally speaks of *looking away from one thing so as to see and understand another*. What is it that we have currently or have in the past fixed our eyes upon? Generally speaking there are only three things we might have our eyes fixed on; **encumbrances** (good or bad hindrances to the faith); **sin** (the opposite of faith); or **Jesus** (the epitome, example and end of faith). We are to look away from one thing (encumbrances and sin) in order to see something better, that is Jesus. If I might paraphrase the intent of this statement, I would say that we are to be *turning our eyes or attention away from other things in order to solidly and solely fix them on Jesus*. We have the five great cries of the Reformation, *sola scriptura* (Scripture Alone); *Solus Christus* (Christ Alone); *Sola Gratia* (Grace Alone); *Soli Fide* (Faith Alone); and *Soli Deo Gloria* (To God’s Glory Alone) – but here we have in essence another *sola* – *sola Jesu!* (Jesus alone) – Jesus alone is to be pre-eminent, that is our priority in life. Is this so for you? What are you fixing your attention to at the cost of truly gazing upon the

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greatness of Jesus? Is knowing Jesus the most important thing to you? This is the call – this is the exhortation – this is the plea and the means by which we rightly run the race of faith – we fix our attention, our gaze, our stare upon Jesus.

If you would turn with me Colossians 3:1-2, we see the apostle Paul make a very similar exhortation. This is the essence of the life of faith. We read:

**1 Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ [are in a right relationship with Jesus], keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.
2 Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth.**

Our priority, our concerted effort, is to be focused on Jesus and the things of Jesus. Is this what you experience in your life of faith? Do you find true satisfaction in Jesus? Beloved, I submit to you that true satisfaction comes when we learn to know Jesus; to savor Jesus; to treasure Jesus. Jesus should be to us as an inexhaustible treasure chest where day by day we find new jewels to marvel at and display to others. Such a view of Jesus is developed within us as we come to more clearly and more accurately fix our eyes on Him – to see Him as He truly is. Beloved, if you sense that your satisfaction of Jesus is waning, then you need a refreshing vision of Him – you need to *turn your eyes or attention away from other things in order to solidly and solely fix them on Jesus.*

B. A Contemplative Act

In addition to being a concerted, determined act, “fixing our eyes on Jesus” is also then to be a **contemplative** act whereby we rightly answer the question, “who is Jesus?” We are to turn away from all other things in order that we might rightly see and understand who Jesus is. And so, just who is Jesus? We might begin to ponder many things here, but let us be reminded of what the author of Hebrews has to say. Do you remember that in the opening verses of this letter, the author specifies no less than seven truths concerning who Jesus is? Let us turn there as we quickly recall these great facets concerning the person of Jesus. In Hebrews 1:2-3, Jesus is...

1. The Heir of all things.

“[God] ...has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things...”

Simply stated, all things in heaven and on earth belong to Jesus. He is the rightful possessor of all things. No one on earth truly owns anything. Your possessions and even your life belong to Jesus and the question is simply this, “are you being a good and godly steward of those things Jesus has given you to manage for Him?” Do you contemplate Jesus as the possessor or heir of all things?

2. The Creator

“through whom also He [God] made the world...”

The word “world” here literally speaks of “ages” or times. The idea is that all time, space, energy and matter that make up the ages have been created by Jesus. Do you see that all your times belong to Jesus? In Psalm 31:14-15, David recognized this truth saying, **“But as for me, I trust in You, O LORD, I say, “You are my God.” My times are in your**

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hand...” As believers in Jesus Christ, do we properly recognize our times, seasons and life as being His creation?

3. The radiance of God’s glory

“And He is the radiance of His glory...”

This is a way of saying that Jesus is the visible manifestation of God’s glory – that is the very essence of God. In other words, do we contemplate that apart from Jesus, we would not know the full greatness of the glory of God? In John 1:18 the apostle reminds us,

No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained [revealed the glory] Him.

4. The exact representation of God’s nature

“...and the exact representation of His nature...”

Here we are to note that Jesus is the exact reproduction of God in human form. Turn with me to Colossians as we consider some similar thoughts as expressed by the apostle Paul.

Colossians 1:15

He is the image [the visible reproduction in human form] of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.

Colossians 1:19

For it was the Father's good pleasure for all the fullness [of who God is] to dwell in Him [Jesus],

Colossians 2:9

For in Him [Jesus] all the fullness of Deity [all that makes God, God] dwells in bodily form...

Let us contemplate the greatness of the God-man, God incarnate, fixing our eyes to consider the deity of Jesus continually. For if you want to know God, then you must know Jesus (John 14:8-10).

John 14:8-10

8 Philip said to Him, "Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us." 9 Jesus said to him, "Have I been so long with you, and yet you have not come to know Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; how can you say, 'Show us the Father'? 10 "Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father is in Me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on My own initiative, but the Father abiding in Me does His works."

5. The Sustainer

“and upholds all things by the word of His power...”

As we contemplate Jesus, do we fix our eyes on His providence, realizing our dependence on Jesus for all things? As we fix our eyes on Jesus, we learn the problem of

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human self-sufficiency – that truly it does not exist. Mankind is absolutely dependent upon Jesus not only for salvation (Acts 4:12) but also for the basic necessities of life as Psalm 145:15-16 so aptly puts it...

15 The eyes of all look to You, and You give them their food in due time. 16 You open Your hand and satisfy the desire of every living thing.

As we truly fix our eyes on Jesus, we come to recognize that even our daily existence depends upon the word of Jesus' sustaining power.

6. The Perfect Sacrifice

"When He had made purification of sins..."

This reminds us of man's condition before God, as unable to do anything to make himself presentable to God. Jesus alone, "soli Jesu!" purifies believers, for when Jesus made purification of sins, He did so by Himself (for there is no other Savior), acting upon Himself (voluntarily laying down His life for the sheep), offering Himself as the one and only sacrifice for sin. For we read in Hebrews 9:26 and 10:12...

Hebrews 9:26

...but now once at the consummation of the ages He has been manifested to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself.

Hebrews 10:12

but He, having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time, SAT DOWN AT THE RIGHT HAND OF GOD...

This is what we are to see as we fix our eyes on Jesus.

7. The Sovereign Ruler

"...He sat down at the right hand of the majesty on high."

He is the rightful ruler of all things. As Colossians 1:16-18 remind us:

16 For by 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. 17 He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. 18 He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything.

As we rightly contemplate who Jesus is, He will come to have first place in everything – that is, He will become most important to us.

C. A Corporate Act

We have seen then that fixing our eyes on Jesus is a concerted act as well as a contemplative act. But let us quickly note that it is also corporate act. Read the beginning of Hebrews 12:2 carefully, "**fixing our eyes on Jesus...**" This is not simply an individual act,

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although we must all individually fix our eyes on Jesus, but the Greek here emphasizes that this is something we are to do together. This is an act of corporate worship. What do we say about Jesus to one another? Are we saying anything at all? Do other things find prominence in our conversations about Jesus? Do “trivial discussions” become more important than meaningful conversations about Jesus? I say to you that unless we properly contemplate Jesus, we will not properly speak to one another about Jesus. Our worship will become shallow and meaningless. Let us strive to speak to one another of the excellence of Jesus, the heir of all things, the creator, the radiance of God’s glory, the exact representation of God’s nature, the sustainer, the perfect sacrifice and our one and only sovereign Lord.

D. A Comprehensive Act

“...the author and perfecter of faith...”

So, we have seen that fixing our eyes on Jesus is a concerted act, a contemplative act as well as a corporate act. Finally, let us note that it is also a comprehensive act for Jesus is **“the author and perfecter of faith...”** This is a beautifully full and rich statement that might simplistically be restated to say that Jesus is the beginning and the end of faith, truly the Alpha and Omega of faith. To see Jesus as the author and perfecter of faith is to understand the comprehensive, all-encompassing importance of Jesus from the start to the finish of this race of faith.

The word “author” carries a lot of meaning. Basically it tells us that Jesus is the origin, the very source of faith. Apart from Jesus there is no faith – there is no salvation or relationship with God apart from believing in who Jesus is and what He has done. But the word “author” also speaks of “one who takes the lead, or sets the example most worth following.” Jesus, note again the earthly human name, as a man, is our prime example of faith, living on this earth with a firm trust in the person, promises and provisions of God. By faith, Jesus, we will be told, endured the cross. Why? One of the reasons was to show us the reward of faith. He believed the promise of God to grant Him joy and to restore Him to the blissful presence of God. In Psalm 16, noted as a Messianic Psalm, or a Psalm that speaks to us of Jesus, we read this in the closing verses (10-11), statements that point us to Jesus –

10 For You will not abandon my soul to Sheol; Nor will You allow Your Holy One to undergo decay. 11 You will make known to me the path of life; In Your presence is fullness of joy; In Your right hand there are pleasures forever.

Jesus was shown the path of life, and by His obedience to the point of death, even death on the cross, Jesus paved the way in the presence of God where there is fullness of joy and pleasures forever. You might recall that the author of Hebrews speaks to this idea of Jesus, the God-man, paving the way for believing humanity to also enter the presence of God. Look at Hebrews 4:14-16

14 Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God [Jesus, humanity has “passed through the heavens”], let us hold fast our confession. 15 For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin.

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16 Therefore let us draw near [through Jesus, following the lead and the path of Jesus, who authored the way] with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

Also in Hebrews 6:20 we read specifically that **“Jesus has entered [the presence of God] as a forerunner for us...”** It is in this way that Jesus then is the origin, source and leader of faith.

And then, to reveal the all-encompassing supremacy of Jesus, He is also called the “perfecter of faith.” The word “perfecter” speaks of Jesus as the one who consummates, fulfills, completes and finishes faith. Jesus is not only the beginning of faith, but also end of faith. There will be a time with faith will be no more. We sing of it in the hymn, “It is Well with My Soul” –

“And Lord, haste the day when the faith shall be sight....”

In other words, faith must start in Jesus, having contemplated who He is, but faith will also end in Jesus, when Jesus is revealed in His power and glory. It is interesting to note many NT passages that link the idea of faith leading us to end of faith, the revelation of Jesus Christ. In 1 Peter 1:3-9 we read this –

3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, 4 to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, 5 who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. 6 In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, 7 so that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ; 8 and though you have not seen Him, you love Him, and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, 9 obtaining as the outcome of your faith the salvation of your souls.

And additionally let us look at 1 John 2:28-3:2

28 Now, little children, abide in Him, so that when He appears, we may have confidence and not shrink away from Him in shame at His coming. 29 If you know that He is righteous, you know that everyone also who practices righteousness is born of Him. 3:1 See how great a love the Father has bestowed on us, that we would be called children of God; and such we are. For this reason the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. 2 Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is.

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Jesus is the “author” and “perfecter” of faith – the start and the finish. No one comes to God apart from Jesus and no one will be kept in the presence of God apart from Jesus. And so, as we consider fixing our eyes on Jesus as being a concerted, a contemplative, a corporate and a comprehensive act, let me ask you – have you started with Jesus? Have you truly entered into a living, vital, daily and intense relationship with Him? Do you believe that He came to this earth as a man, to be your only perfect sacrifice, paying the price of your sins on the cross so that coming to Him you might see him as heir of all things, as the creator of your times, as being God incarnate, as your provider, sustainer and only sovereign? That is where you start. But then do you also see Jesus as your perfecter, your end, your goal? Do you fix your eyes on Jesus so as to be made more and more like Him? May that be the prayer of each one this morning.

For anything that that takes your eyes off of Jesus – of seeing Him in His fullness – is either an encumbrance or an entangling sin that must be laid aside, put off, cast away. Let us behold Jesus and feast on His excellencies. Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria

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