

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 (c)

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.

This morning I would like to finish up our look at this passage that calls us to run, literally to strive or agonize in this race of faith. As we seek to live our lives to the glory of God and to the exaltation of Jesus Christ, we are to pursue and persevere in our trust of the person, promises and provisions of God. In other words, if I speak of Jesus Christ to a family member who then ridicules my faith, I am not to give up or give in, but to continue to trust in the person, promises and provisions of God. If I lose my job because of my convictions regarding Jesus, I must strive to trust God. If I get bad news from the doctors office or simply feel the effects of age diminish my abilities, I am yet to trust God, I am yet to glorify the Lord Jesus Christ; I must continue to give praise and thanks to Him from whom all blessings flow.

But why? Why must I strive, why must I agonize, why must I persevere to live for and exalt Jesus in this life? In a phrase – because He alone is worthy – He truly deserves the accolades, the praise, and the thanks for all things. The more I come to know, to really know the person and supremacy of Jesus Christ and what it is that He has done for me, the more the things of this earth, good or bad, pleasurable or painful, will become insignificant in light of His glory.

As we come to the end of verse 3 of Hebrews 12, let me remind you what it is we have been looking at. In verses 1-3 is a call, an exhortation, a command that those who are in Jesus must and will compete and complete the race of faith. There are seven characteristics of how this race is to be run, five of which we have already studied. We have noted that if we are to compete and complete the race of faith we must run...

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.
5. With a focus on the **excellence** of Jesus – fixing our eyes on Him who is the author (the beginning) and perfecter (the end) of faith.

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This morning we will consider the final two characteristics of what it means to compete and complete this race of faith. I submit to you that we must...

6. Foster the expectation Jesus (12:2b); and
7. Follow the example of Jesus (12:3)

So let us begin with this sixth characteristic and see how we might improve the quality of our race of faith by fostering the expectation of Jesus.

6. Foster the expectation of Jesus (12:2b)

“...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.”

There is a familiar saying that says, “If you aim at nothing, you will hit it every time.” Obviously the meaning of life is found in the obtaining or reaching of goals. Everyone is goal oriented. From the child seeking to steal a cookie out of the jar, to the housewife trying to keep the home, to the corporate executive striving to climb the ladder of success – everyone is about some goal. Even the person who seeks to do nothing actually has that nothing as his goal. This striving after a goal is a part of humanity and so it should not surprise us to see that Jesus - who was not only 100% God but also 100% man had goals and expectations.

The fundamental difference between the goals and expectations of Jesus as compared to the goals and expectations of most people is that those of Jesus were God-driven; that is, they were based on and directed by the will of God. Look with me at how this goal and expectation of Jesus is revealed by noting just a couple of examples. First, let us note John 8:28-29

28 So Jesus said, “When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am He, and I do nothing on My own initiative, but I speak these things as the Father taught Me. 29 And He who sent Me is with Me; He has not left Me alone, for I always do the things that are pleasing to Him.”

In verse 28 we see that Jesus was not doing things according to His own will or initiative, but rather by the will of the Father. In verse 29 we find that it was by being God-directed rather than self-directed that Jesus was pleasing to the Father. Now let us look at one other passage before we delve into our Hebrews text. Note with me John 15:10-11

10 If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love; just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love. 11 These things I have spoken to you so that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be made full.

Here I would have you notice three things. First, that Jesus, by keeping the commandments of the Father (being God-directed), was abiding in the love of the Father and second, that by keeping these commandments He had “joy.” The third thing I would have you note is that if we then keep the commandments of Jesus, that is, if we are God-directed, we also abide in the love of the Father and we also will experience the full joy of Jesus. Now then,

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what does this have to do with fostering the expectation of Jesus in Hebrews 12:2b? Let us turn back there.

Like John 15:10-11, notice the goal of Jesus in Hebrews 12:2b, **“who for the joy set before Him...”** As we will come to see, one of the expectations of Jesus as He lived and even died on this earth was to experience joy. The word “joy” speaks of that which brings the highest degree of delight or the greatest gladness. There was a “joy” – a delight that was **“set before”** – literally placed before the view of Jesus. This “joy” was His expectation – but just what was this joy? What was it that delighted Jesus? What was it that brought Jesus the greatest gladness? Might I point out two things that are clearly implied by our text?

First, I submit to you that Jesus sought joy in the result of the cross; namely the reconciliation of sinful men to the Holy God. It delighted Jesus and would continue to delight Jesus that as a result of His death on the cross for the sins of His people – He might accomplish their salvation. This idea has already been revealed to us in the book of Hebrews. In Hebrews 2:9-10 we read this –

9 But we do see Him who was made for a little while lower than the angels, namely, Jesus, because of the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, so that by the grace of God He might taste death for everyone. 10 For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things, and through whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to perfect the author of their salvation through sufferings.

Jesus knew there was joy in accomplishing the salvation of men. In John 17:4, in the high priestly prayer of Jesus, a prayer in which Jesus is commenting on the accomplished work the cross would obtain, He said,

I glorified You on the earth, having accomplished the work which You have given Me to do.

Jesus endured the cross because He knew the joyful outcome was the reconciliation of sinful men to God. To put it in crude vernacular, it made Jesus most happy to think that after His time on the cross, after His suffering, His chosen ones would be made forever blessed and forever perfect.

The description of the joy of Jesus in addition to this reconciliation of men is His being reunited with the Father. Note the end of Hebrews 2, that at the completion of the work of Jesus and His ascension into heaven, he **“sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.”** In other words, the joy of Jesus is that He would be sitting in the place of achieved victory and power which is in the very presence of God the Father. Again, in the high priestly prayer of John 17, Jesus indicates this joy and delight of being in the Father’s presence. In John 17:5 we read –

Now, Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was.

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Jesus here is remembering the glory of being in the presence of the Father and being in His presence brings Jesus joy. So then, Jesus found joy in the reconciliation of sinful men to God and in being reunited with the Father. Let me point out a couple of other thoughts before we make an application. This “joy” that was “**set before Him**” is a continual joy. The verb “**set before**” is actually in the present tense, meaning that Jesus experienced the joy of man’s reconciliation and of being reunited with the Father at the cross, after the cross, at His ascension into heaven, as He currently sits at the right hand of the throne of God and on into eternity.

Let me make an application before we move on. We are being called to look at Jesus as we consider how to live our life of faith and the characteristic we find here is the expectation of Jesus; He expected joy as He faithfully accomplished the things given Him to do by the Father; the joy of man’s salvation and the joy of being in the presence of God. This is an attitude that is worth fostering, worth developing in our own lives. To evaluate our goals and ambitions. Of all the things you are aiming at as goals or ends; of all the things that you consider would bring you happiness, are the goals of seeing the lost come to know Jesus and be reconciled to God along with an expectation of being in the presence of God top your list? What brings you greatest joy and delight? May we learn to have the joy of Jesus, the salvation of men and dwelling in the glory of God.

Now, there is one more phrase here in Hebrews 12:2 we need to consider. Jesus had joy, but it was joy experienced in spite of something else, something horrific. It was this joy, this expectation that enabled Jesus to “**endure the cross, despising the shame.**” Jesus was persevering under the pain and punishment of the cross because, as we noted, He knew the result. It is amazing what a person can endure when he knows the outcome. A small example of this is found in women giving birth. When my wife was giving birth to Luke, I say to you that she was stressed out physically and emotionally more than at any other time in her life – nothing else compared to this. So why then, just a couple of days after the experience would my wife say to me, “that wasn’t so bad – I could do that again!” Why would anyone want to endure such stress and pain? Because of the result, because of the joy that awaits on the other side – the baby! This is what makes a woman endure childbirth. And, in a far greater manner, the joy of the new birth that awaited people who would believe in His life and message, enabled Jesus to endure the cross.

But Jesus did not just endure the cross. Unlike the glory and honor a couple has as they are expecting a child, the death of Jesus on the cross was not, at that time, deemed and honorable and glorious experience. How little do we consider the shame, the disgrace, the embarrassment, the indignity, and the deep personal humiliation of the cross. To die on the cross signified that you were among the lowest of society’s low, the most base of criminals, worthy of no human rights or considerations. Oh that we might appreciate with a fresh comprehension that the cross was truly, as the hymn writer expressed, “*the emblem of suffering and shame.*” But what was the attitude of Jesus toward this more humiliating, most degrading human experience. He despised it – a word that means he accounted it as nothing. In comparison with what Jesus had to look forward to, any suffering, any hostility, any pain, any affliction, any ridicule was regarded as nothing. In Romans 2:4 this word is used –

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Or do you think lightly [despise] of the riches of His kindness and tolerance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance?

In other words, how horrific a death it was, Jesus regarded the cross lightly in comparison to the joy set before Him – that joy being the reconciliation of sinful men to God and of His being reunited in the glorious presence of the Father. Should we seek to foster this same expectation in our circumstances? Yes, based not only here on our Hebrews text but consider the familiar words of Paul in 2 Corinthians 4:16-18 -

16 Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day. 17 For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, 18 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.

Beloved, the mind that is fixed on the glory to come can easily think lightly of all things of this earth, for they are nothing more than momentary, light affliction. Let us foster this expectation of Jesus.

7. Follow the example of Jesus (12:3)

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

This brings us to the final characteristic of how to run the race of faith. Simply put, we must follow the example of Jesus [read text]. Much of this verse can be understood in terms of what we have fleshed out in verse 2, but there are some things to note.

First, remember that in verses 1-2, the main verb was the exhortation, ***“let us run...the race.”*** In Hebrews 12:3 we have another verb that serves as an exhortation; ***“...consider Him...”*** The basic meaning of this verb is “to contemplate; to estimate or to compare. The Greek verb, analogizomai is the basis of our English word “analogy.” And analogy is a comparison of two different things in order to see similarities. We are to carefully consider Jesus; we are called to carefully compare our situations and circumstances to that of Jesus. I believe the point of this consideration is this, as we consider all that Jesus endured for us to be reconciled to God and have the hope of being in God’s presence, anything we suffer in this life, by comparison, while perhaps in some ways similar, will not compare to the depth of pain, suffering and hostility that Jesus endured. Therefore, the conclusion is this that since Christ endured the cross and all the antagonism associate with it, for the joy set before Him, whatever we might face, whatever trials or tribulations, we can surely endure the same as those who are in union with Jesus.

I would encourage you to see it this way, that to “consider Jesus” – to compare your life, your joys and your sufferings is to become increasing Christo-centric, increasing God-directed in your thinking. For what happens when we compare our sufferings and experiences with those of Jesus? Our trials and difficulties become comparatively small and we can begin to see them as momentary light afflictions that are producing in us an eternal weight of glory. So then, bad eyes, bad teeth, bad bones, estranged or strained relationships, hostility because of

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your faith, all these things become momentary light afflictions in light of having been reconciled to God by the blood of Christ and of having the hope of eternal life in the blissful presence of God.

And what is it that happens if I follow this example of Jesus? Does my life become without trial? No, but if I follow the example of Jesus and compare my life and my trials to what He endured for me, I **“will not grow weary and lose heart.”** This statement is another ancient sports saying. When a runner in the games at the time of Paul collapsed due to exhaustion, it was said that he grew weary and lost heart; both his body and his will gave up. What is the only remedy, the only sure way a person can compete and complete the race of faith without failing in body and in mind – he must **“consider”** Jesus. He must completely and consistently regard what Jesus went through for him; he must keep his eyes fixed on Jesus. Everything in his life must be compared to Jesus. And a right view of Jesus will result in having Jesus come to have first place in everything.

How are you doing with having Jesus come to have first place in everything? You know, it is interesting that of all the actions we have looked at, the first six are all in the present tense; we at present have a great cloud of witnesses surrounding us; we are to presently and continually lay aside both encumbrances and the entanglements of sin; we are to presently and continually run the race before us; we are to presently and continually be fixing our eyes on Jesus; and we, like Jesus, are to be presently and continually fostering the expectation of joy in our race. But this last verb is not in the present tense. It is an aorist imperative which signifies a one for all action. This is a call to make a decision. Remember that most, if not all of the first readers were Jews. And many of these had not fully come to Jesus Christ, thinking that they could be saved by some other means than fully trusting in the work of Christ alone. Many were tempted to think it was Christ plus the law, or even simply the law and the traditions without Christ. But the author is pressing the point, calling for a response – if you carefully contemplate Jesus in light of law, in light of His priesthood, in light of His sacrifice, in light of His superiority over angels, over Moses and over Joshua – if you rightly consider Him, the only conclusion is that Jesus alone saves; Jesus alone reconciles sinful men to a holy God; Jesus alone is the example of how we ought to live our lives to the glory and pleasure of God.

For some of you here today, Jesus may be nothing more than a great man and even recognized as the Son of God. You may believe that He lived, walked this earth and died on the cross. You may even believe that He rose again and ascended to heaven. But such is not enough. Such is not a full and saving consideration of Jesus. For in addition to believing such things, what does Romans 10:9 say must be part of the confession:

that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved;

Jesus Christ must be recognized as “Lord” – a word that carries several meanings. First, Jesus is to be recognized as God – as Yahweh, the name of God given in the Old Testament. The Greek word for “Lord” was used to translate the Hebrew name of God. Second, the word “Lord” means master, leader or captain. To consider Jesus as anything else but your master, leader, captain is deficient for salvation. Jesus is not only and separately Savior, He is the LORD who is Savior and a right consideration of Him turns the heart over in

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sweet surrender to His will. Remember I said that to rightly consider Him is to become increasingly Christo-centric; Christ centered. If I lay aside encumbrances and sin; if I fix my eyes on Jesus, if I develop His expectations, then I will once and for all see Jesus as the only Lord and Savior whose example I can follow, knowing that He alone is the way, the truth and life – that no one comes to the Father but through such a consideration of Him. Have you so considered Him? And how do you know if you are so considering Him? Are you following His example, having a right expectation of trials and tribulations, knowing that such are but momentary light affliction in comparison to the eternal weight of glory that belongs to those who are “in Christ” – who are “following Christ” – who are, in the words of 1 John 2:6 walking in the same manner as Jesus has walked, in light and according to God’s Word.

What areas of your life are not in accordance to God’s Word right now? What areas of your life have got you down and depressed rather than rejoicing that whatever trials you go through now are nothing compared to the bliss of heaven in the presence of God? What areas of your life are not focused on Jesus? What encumbrances and sins need to be laid aside? Have you forgotten to thank the Lord for so great a cloud of witnesses, such wonderful examples of faith as revealed in the lives of the faithful that you might know the certainty and reality of faith? May we seek to answer these questions thoughtfully. May we repent of sins and shortcomings that hinder our faith. And may we become increasingly Christ-centered; Christ-focused; Christ-exalting in our lives. Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria

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**The Book of Hebrews – The Superiority of Christ
Hebrews 12:1-3 – Consider Him (Part 2)
October 14, 2007**