

## **“Looking Unto Jesus”**

*“Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us. (2) Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God,”* Hebrews 12:1-2.

In the midst of the above scriptures, at the beginning of verse two, is the phrase **“Looking unto Jesus.”** That phrase constitutes the title of this article. However, we shall first consider that which is stated in verse one.

Verse one begins with *“therefore,”* a word suggesting a connection between what had just been stated in chapter eleven and the application being made at the beginning of chapter twelve. Chapter eleven of Hebrews has been referred to as “Faith’s Hall of Fame,” or “the roll call of the faithful.” The chapter begins in verse one by giving an inspired definition of faith, it being *“the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen,”* and it is followed by a lengthy list of Old Testament worthies who demonstrated what it really means to walk *“by faith.”* The writer mentioned Abel, who *“offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain”* (v. 4), then Enoch who *“was taken away so that he did not see death”* (v. 5), then Noah who *“prepared an ark for the saving of his household”* (v. 7), then Abraham who *“waited for a city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God”* (v. 10). Following these mention was also made of Sarah (v. 11), Isaac (v. 20), Jacob (v. 21), Joseph (v. 22), Moses (v. 23), Rahab (v. 31), Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel (v. 32), and countless others who have *“obtained a good testimony through faith”* (v. 39),

Then the writer began chapter twelve with the word *“therefore,”* metaphorically likening the aforementioned Old Testament worthies as being *“so great a cloud of witnesses,”* people who had successfully weathered the storms of life, obeyed God notwithstanding the almost unimaginable difficulties, resisted temptation, and faithfully served God both “in season and out of season.” These are likened to that great *“cloud of witnesses”* by which we are *“surrounded”* and who, by their example, demonstrated what it really means to put God first. And when we pause to reflect upon what **they** went through we are made to feel ashamed when we examine the weakness of some of **our** excuses for failing to do our best in serving God!

After mentioning that *“great cloud of witnesses,”* the sacred writer (addressing the Hebrew Christians), then said *“Let us lay aside every weight and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us.”* Herein the life of a Christian is likened to a *“race,”* a metaphor which also occurs elsewhere in the Scriptures. Cf. I Cor. 9:24; 2 Tim. 2:5; 2 Tim. 4:7). To successfully *“run...the race that is set before us,”* we must do certain things. We must *“lay aside every weight and the sin which so easily ensnares us..”* The life of a Christian is a marathon! We are in a *“race”* which lasts for the rest of our lives. To win a race, unnecessary weights must be laid aside. Likewise, in the *“Christian race,”* sin (all sin!) must be laid aside, and we must *“run with endurance!”* The fact that *“endurance”* is required means that the *“race...set before us”* can be long and difficult; Jesus said *“he who endures to the end shall be saved,”* Matt. 24:13. Too many give up when they ought to press on! And now we come to the point of primary emphasis — **“looking unto Jesus!”**

**We must look “Unto Jesus” Because:**

**1. He is “the author and finisher of our faith,”** Heb. 12:2). “Author” is translated from *archegos* (Greek), which “primarily signifies one who takes a lead in, or provides the first occasion of anything” (Vine, **Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words**). It is translated “Prince” in Acts 3:15, which refers to Jesus as “the Prince of life,” and it is translated “captain” in Heb. 2:10, where Jesus is called “the captain of their salvation.” Jesus is also, in Heb. 12:2, referred to as the “finisher of our faith.” “Finisher” is translated from *teleioo* (Greek), which “denotes to bring to an end in the sense of completing or perfecting” (Vine, *ibid.*).

**2. We must look “unto Jesus” because He, “for the joy set before him endured the cross...”** Death by crucifixion was certainly not a source of joy! However, Jesus, by enduring “the cross,” became the sacrificial “lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world,” John 1:29. Jesus, by His death, was able to provide salvation for all men (Phil. 2:5-11). And Jesus knew that following His death, burial, and resurrection, He would be raised up to sit at the right hand of the throne of God in heaven! Cf. Heb. 1:3; 8:1; 10:12; 12:2, etc.

**3. We must look “unto Jesus” because He “endured the cross,”** as well as the “shame” invariably associated with death by crucifixion! It is impossible for anyone to completely fathom the extent of pain suffered by one who was nailed to a cross. Moreover, death by crucifixion was reserved for the most hardened of criminals, and it was always accompanied by humiliation (cf. Deut 21:23; Gal. 3:13). Yes, as the Hebrew writer stated, Jesus endured “such hostility of sinners against Himself” (Heb. 12:3; cf. Matt. 27:39-44; Mark 15:27-32; Luke 23:35-37). Sadly, however, in contrast to Jesus, many are ready to “quit the church” simply because they were the objects of someone’s criticism, or because they were made to believe “there are hypocrites in the church!”

**4. We must look “unto Jesus” because He “has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God,”** Heb. 12:2. Being thus seated “at the right hand of the throne of God,” Jesus is able to serve as the “one Mediator between God and men,” I Tim. 2:5. Being “at the right hand of the throne of God,” Jesus is able “to make intercession for” those who “come to God through Him,” Heb. 9:25. Being “at the right hand of the throne of God,” Jesus is able serve as our “Advocate with the Father,” I John 2:1, and also as our “merciful and faithful High Priest,” Heb. 2:17.

**5. We must look “unto Jesus” lest we “become weary and discouraged” in our souls,** Heb. 2:3. Weariness and Discouragement are among the most effective of Satan’s tools! He is our “adversary,” and, like a “roaring lion,” he is constantly seeking to “devour” us, I Pet. 5:8. We must not be ignorant of his “devices,” 2 Cor. 2:11. However, when we continually look “unto Jesus,” and ponder what He endured to save us, and what He is now doing as our “advocate with the Father,” we are emboldened to “fight the good fight of faith,” I Tim. 6:12, and motivated to be “faithful unto death,” Rev. 2:10.

### **But Running “The Race That Is Set Before Us” Requires:**

**1. Preparation!** One cannot run “the Christian race” unless he is a Christian! To become a Christian, one must **hear** the word which produces **faith** (Rom. 10:17), **repent** of all sin (Luke 13:3,5), **confess** faith in Jesus Christ as the Son of God (Acts 8:37; Rom. 10:10), and Be “**baptized into Christ**” (Gal. 3:27), and “for the remission of sins” (Acts 2:38).

**2. Patience!** The Hebrew writer said we must “run with patience” (KJV), or with “endurance” (NKJV) “the race that is set before us,” Heb. 12:1. In this “race” winners don’t quit, and quitters don’t win!

**3. Be mindful of “the prize!”** We must have the attitude of the apostle Paul who said “I

*press toward the goal for the **prize** of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus,*” Phil. 3:14. Those who ran in the famous Isthmian Games of ancient Greece looked forward to a “*perishable crown,*” but Christians who successfully run the race that is set before us will receive “*an **imperishable** crown,*” I Cor. 9:25); yea, the “*crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him,*” Jas. 1:12, elsewhere referred to as “*the crown of glory that does not fade away*” (I Pet. 5:4).

**Conclusion:** Friend, if you are not “*looking unto Jesus,*” you are looking in the wrong direction, and you are traveling a path which takes you to a place which called “*hell*” (Matt. 10:28) and to “*everlasting punishment*” (Matt. 25:46), the likes of which cannot be comprehended this side of the day of judgment! Cf. Mark 9: 43-48. To **whom** are you looking? In which **direction** are you traveling?

- Bobby Witherington

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