

# Fixing Our Eyes on Jesus

HEBREWS 1:1-3

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Over the past several years, British photographer Oliver Curtis has released a series of pictures of famous monuments. Only his series of pictures is a little unusual, because he has intentionally pointed his camera in the wrong direction. In the picture on the wall up here, for example, we are looking at the Taj Mahal in India. The Taj Mahal, of course, is that beautiful marble building with the spires, basically a mausoleum built by an emperor to honor one of his favorite wives back in the 1600's. Mr. Curtis, though, instead of facing this beautiful building, took a picture looking in the wrong direction.

The one up here right now is a scene some of you might recognize. It is a picture of the Mona Lisa at the Louvre in Paris. Only instead of facing the Mona Lisa, Mr. Curtis turned around to face the opposite wall. I actually have a picture of the camp chicken in this room. But in my opinion, the painting on this wall is actually much more impressive than the Mona Lisa. The painting on this wall is a painting of Jesus changing the water into wine at the wedding feast in Cana. To me, this was the highlight. But again, to most people, the camera is facing in the wrong direction.

I guess I can give you a few seconds to figure this one out. But it might take a little while, because this is a picture of Stonehenge in England. Of course, he is not facing the stones. He is facing in the wrong direction.

Some of you might be able to recognize this as being the edge of Ellis Island. But of course, we are not facing the Statue of Liberty. We are looking away from it.

What we have here in the final picture is the stump of a freshly cut tree. If we were to turn around, though, we would be standing right in front of the Eiffel Tower! But again, the camera has been turned away from the main attraction. In addition to these, there are many more. And I certainly admire the creativity.

As we think about these pictures, though, I'd like for us to think for a few moments this morning about the danger of losing our focus in the Christian faith. As Christians, there is a constant danger that we might (for whatever reason) get distracted and that we might turn away from where we need to be looking, and that we might ultimately turn away from the Christian faith.

To help us keep our focus as we live in this world, I would invite you this morning to turn with me to the opening verses of Hebrews 12 (p. 1884). The book of Hebrews, of course, was written to some people from a Jewish background (the Hebrews), and these people were very close to turning back to Judaism. They had come to believe in Jesus, but the Roman Empire was starting to crack down on Christianity. And so they were tempted to go back to what (in their view) was safe.

Many times, when we find ourselves in a new and challenging situation, we are tempted to go back, to go back to what we know. A new college graduate in a brand new job, for example, may really want to go back to just being a student. Someone in a difficult marriage might want to go back to being single for a change. A newly promoted supervisor at work might think from time to time how nice it would be to go back to just showing up every day. When things get difficult, sometimes we think about going back to what we know, back to where we feel safe. And that seems to be what is happening here in the book of Hebrews. The Christian faith is getting difficult, the Roman government has officially outlawed Christianity, the harassment has started, people are getting separated from their families, things are getting complicated, and these people want to go back.

So the author of Hebrews, then, lays out the case that no, you should not go back, because Jesus is better. He is better than the angels (in Chapters 1-2). He is better than Moses (in Chapters 3-4). He is a better High Priest (in Chapters 5-8). He is a better sacrifice (in Chapters 9-10). And then the author gives some examples of some of the great heroes of the Jewish faith who also faced difficult times but stayed focused and pressed forward toward the goal. And so in Hebrews 11 we read about great heroes of faith like Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, and many others. The author then closes Chapter 11 with a reminder that these great heroes died without ever being able to see and realize what we now have in the Christian faith. We now have what they gave up everything to try to see. And that brings us to the passage I'd like for us to consider this morning – Hebrews 12:1-3. Notice, please, the encouraging words, the word of God – Hebrews 12:1-3,

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

We could spend weeks on this passage! The author describes the Christian life as a race, and as we run this race, we are to lay aside every weight, the sin that tries to pull us down. You know that I am not a runner, I am more of a walker. I would say I'm a hiker, but I picture a hiker as someone with a pickaxe going up the side of a mountain. I'm more of a guy who likes walking, and I like walking in nature. But what I've found in looking for equipment for walking in nature (or hiking) is that weight can be incredibly important to some people. There are those who will buy one backpack over another because it is just a few ounces lighter. You look around for shoes, or pants, or snowshoes, or even a tent, and the weight of those items can be so important. An ounce here, an ounce there, and the equipment we bring with us out in the wilderness can really make a difference. So the author describes sin as extra baggage, or weight, that pulls us down as we run the Christian race. We are to run this race with ***“endurance,”*** the author says. We are to run, remembering all of these great heroes who are witnesses, who are, in a sense, cheering us on. And this is where we come to our main idea this morning, the command that we are to run this race, ***“fixing our eyes on Jesus.”*** We are to run with our eyes on Jesus.

In drivers ed, many of us learned that we tend to go where we are looking. And so, I remember getting the reminder that when we are driving at night, it is usually not good to stare into the lights of an oncoming car! And the reason is: We tend to go where we are looking! In the same way, as we run in this Christian race, we are to keep our eyes on Jesus. We don't look to the preacher, and we don't necessarily look at each other, because people have a way of letting us down. And so we look to Jesus.

The question I want us to answer this morning is, "Why?" Why do we focus on Jesus? What makes Jesus worthy of our undivided attention? And as we look at our today's text, I believe we find two answers.

I. **First of all, Jesus is worthy of our attention BECAUSE OF WHO HE IS – HE IS THE AUTHOR AND PERFECTER OF OUR FAITH.**

When it comes to faith, Jesus is the beginner of it, and he is also the one who completes it. We look at other translations, and some will describe Jesus as the "*pioneer*" or "*trailblazer*" of faith. And the idea behind the word here is someone who goes first, someone who leads into unknown territory, the guy with the machete hacking a path through the jungle so that the rest of us can follow along behind. He is our "*leader*," he is the "*initiator of faith*" (as some translations put it). He is the "*founder*," the "*source*," the "*one on whom our faith depends from beginning to end*," the "*originator*" of our faith (as other translations put it). Jesus goes first, and so we focus on him exclusively.

Not only is he the author or pioneer of our faith, but we also find in verse 2 that Jesus is the "*perfecter*" of faith. As I understand it, this is the only time this form of this particular word is used in the New Testament. But the idea is: Jesus is the completer of faith. He has accomplished our faith. As some translations put it, Jesus is the "*goal*" of our faith. And so if we want to know what perfect and complete faith looks like, we look to Jesus.

This maturity of faith is what Paul prayed that the Christians in Ephesus might have over in Ephesians 3. Sometimes we might look at our prayers and realize that we are praying primarily for physical needs – brother so-and-so is having surgery next week, somebody has cancer, somebody has been in an accident, and so on – these things can be important, especially to us in these physical bodies that seem to be falling apart. But let us not forget what Paul prayed for. In Ephesians 3:14-19, Paul said,

***<sup>14</sup> For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, <sup>15</sup> from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name, <sup>16</sup> that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man, <sup>17</sup> so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; and that you, being rooted and grounded in love, <sup>18</sup> may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, <sup>19</sup> and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God.***

I don't know about you, but I didn't hear anything about failing health in that passage; instead, I heard Paul pray that these people might grow in their faith, that their faith might be perfected and brought to maturity in Jesus. And that is the same focus we see in Hebrews 12:2. Above all else, we are to keep our eyes fixed on Jesus because of who He is, the author and perfecter of faith. We keep our eyes on him by looking to God in prayer, by singing together, by reading His word, by praising him for who he really is.

II. **As we go back to our text in Hebrews 12:2, we find a second reason to keep our eyes on Jesus – not only because of who he is, but also BECAUSE OF WHAT HE HAS DONE – BECAUSE OF HIS DEATH ON THE CROSS, HE IS OUR EXAMPLE OF JOYFUL ENDURANCE.**

And I do not know whether the author specifically intended that this is the way it is to be taken, but I love that he refers to **“JESUS”** in this passage – not “Jesus Christ,” not “Jesus, the Son of God,” not, “the Lord Jesus,” but simply, **“JESUS.”** I see this as an emphasis on the Lord’s humanity! We fix our eyes on JESUS, **“...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.”** When we think of Jesus, we think of the life he lived among us. And so we fix our eyes on Jesus, not just because of who he is, but also because of what he has done. He came to this earth to suffer and die, and he endured the most painful and humiliating death we could even possibly imagine. And yet, through this process, Jesus did not turn back! But for the joy set before him, he endured the cross, despising the shame, and he did this for us!

In his commentary on Hebrews, the well-known scholar F.F. Bruce describes the shame involved in crucifixion in this way,

To die by crucifixion was to plumb to the very lowest depths of disgrace; it was a punishment reserved for those who were deemed of all men most unfit to live, a punishment for those who were sub-human. From so degrading a death Roman citizens were exempt by ancient statute; the dignity of the Roman name would be besmirched by being brought into association with anything so vile as the cross.

And yet, even facing such a horrible death as this, Jesus did not turn back! He looked past the cross, and for the joy set before him, he endured the shame. Jesus was able to look beyond the shame of the cross, then, and he faced it willingly, for us, for the joy set before him.

And what a great example for us! When we face some difficult situation, and especially if we are ever tempted to give up on the Christian faith, the author of Hebrews would encourage us to keep our eyes on Jesus, who for the joy set before him endured the cross! Like those heroes in Hebrews 11, by faith, we look beyond the challenge to the outcome. We look beyond what we can see so that we can see what truly matters.

Isn’t that what Paul did in our scripture reading this morning (in Philippians 3:12-14)? He didn’t claim to be perfect, but speaking of the resurrection, he said,

**<sup>12</sup> Not that I have already obtained it or have already become perfect, but I press on so that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus. <sup>13</sup> Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, <sup>14</sup> I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.**

Paul was looking forward with his eyes firmly fixed on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith.

And don’t we see the same attitude years later, just before his own death in 2 Timothy 4:6-8?

**<sup>6</sup> For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. <sup>7</sup> I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith; <sup>8</sup> 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.***

Again, like those heroes of faith in Hebrews 11 and like the Lord himself, Paul looked beyond the challenge to the outcome, and his eyes were fixed on Jesus.

**Conclusion:**

That is the main point of our study this morning – we are to go through this life, no matter what happens, ***“fixing our eyes on Jesus.”*** We look to Jesus at all times, 1.) Because of who he is – he is the author and perfecter of faith, and also, 2.) Because of what he has done – he is our example of joyful endurance.

In this life, we have many distractions, many temptations to turn aside, many distractions causing us to miss the main point, many struggles that would cause us miss what this life is all about. Now, if we go to Mount Rushmore and forget to look at those faces up on the mountain, if we just get a great picture of the parking lot, that’s one thing. It would be shame to be right there and to miss the main attraction. But to live this life and miss Jesus? That is a tragedy beyond what we could ever possibly imagine.

This morning, then, the word of God has encouraged us to keep our eyes on Jesus. The Christian life begins with a decision – a decision to explore the word of God, a decision to obey it – looking to Jesus in faith, turning away from sin, and with our eyes on Jesus, allowing ourselves to be buried with him in baptism, for the forgiveness of our sins. If we can help you in that process, we hope you will let us know as we sing this next song. Let’s stand and sing...

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