

Looking Unto Jesus

By Paris Reidhead*

Now will you turn to this portion before us, Hebrews 12. I read the text, the first two verses:

“Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, 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 is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.”

It is to be understood by us this morning that Christ is all, the whole, the circumference of the Christian life. He is not only central in the Christian life, He is our life. An understanding that no one is a Christian unless they are vitally related to Jesus Christ makes this truth that is an axiom to have real meaning in your heart. If you are a Christian, and you are here in the sound of my voice this morning, then that which turns you from a child of death into a child of God is that fact that Jesus Christ in His grace and love has condescended to make your heart His home. He is the whole of our life. He is our life.

Now the church is only a church when it is gathered to Christ. If you have come this morning from any other motive than that you are to meet the Lord Jesus, to see the Lord Jesus, and have fellowship with Him, then whatever profit you may have will be marginal and partial for that profit that He has intended this to mean is when you have gathered to Him, with others that have partaken of His life, He is in the midst exalted and glorified. This is what the church was intended to be. And there is no fellowship apart from Him. He is our fellowship, just as He is our life. Oh, we can have fellowship, and mutual talents, mutual social standing, mutual educational accomplishments. There are many things upon which individuals might fellowship, but that which is Christian fellowship is fellowship in Christ. He has described it. He said, “Two or three are gathered in My Name, there am I in the midst of them” (Mat. 18:20). Of course, we understand that what I have said is true and is to be accepted as true, but we also understand that whereas we can agree with it we do not always practice it. And so there is needed that which we call revival. Revival always comes when people see Christ. You will recall, for instance, in the case of Isaiah that he was in the midst of religious activity. The temple had never been so busy. There had never been such a large choir and chanting of the Psalms of David. There had never been as many lined up with their sheep and turtle doves for offering. There had never been as much money in the coffers as in the time of Isaiah, or at least this was a time of great religious activity.

But something happened in Isaiah’s life. God smote and judged Uzziah the king, and the consequence of that was that bitterness seemed to rise up in the prophet’s heart. He had thought that he was a team with King Uzziah. He would preach and King Uzziah would affect the reformation. But the net result was that when God dealt with the king, Isaiah became bitter and murmured against the Lord and was seemingly for some years (this we are told by those that have studied it) a silence between chapter 5 and chapter 6. Whether that is the case or not, we do know that it was when Isaiah saw the Lord high and lifted up that he saw himself aright, saw the hindrances that had stood in the way of God’s using him, was cleansed and appointed and reappointed for service for the Lord. This was true also of Jeremiah. You find the record of his experience in Ezekiel; of Daniel. You recall when Peter saw the Lord in all His majesty performing a miracle, he cried out, “Depart from me, I am a sinful man” (Luk. 5:8). It was the revelation of Christ to the apostle that caused him to see that whereas touching the law he was blameless, in the eyes of God he was guilty. It is always when we see the Lord that we see ourselves. But what I have noticed happen is this; there are times of great need, of great spiritual dearth, lack of blessing. Then God begins to work because the eyes of the people are turned upon the Lord. When God begins to work the first thing that happens is the people begin to see His working.

I recall years ago as a Pastor in Indiana, that after many months of praying there, through the ministry of a Brother by the name of Hendon Harrison, God came down upon that congregation. There had been an exaltation of the Holiness and of the Majesty of God, and our hearts were smitten and broken. But the consequence of this one hour of blessing when time was forgotten, people were sobbing and weeping and confessing their sins, rising up in the pews where they were seated, and asking for forgiveness of one and another and of the Lord. The net result was that they all went home and immediately began to talk about what had happened, and when we came again expecting to find the Lord still wonderfully there we found that

there had been a grieving of the Spirit of God, because we had gotten our eyes off of Christ and onto what He was doing, and He could no longer work. And it is therefore with me a principle of which I am convinced, that when God begins to work it is imperative that we do not look at the camera as it were, but we keep our eyes focused upon the Lord Jesus. For if we turn and see what He is doing we lose sight of Him, and the only reason He can bless is because He is in the full focus of our heart's concern. Looking unto Jesus, therefore, is not only the beginning of the Christian life, the heart of the Christian life, the secret of the Christian life, but it is also the means whereby He can cause the life of the church to be all that He has intended it to be. Thus, under no circumstances are we to take our eyes away from Him, lest we have the experience of Peter, who when he was invited to walk upon the water was so interested in looking at the water upon which he was standing that his eyes turned away from the Lord and he began to sink. So might it be that this becomes to us a rule, that we accept now for every area of our lives. Looking unto Jesus.

In Hebrews Chapter 11, we have the heroes of faith beginning back with Abel who offered an acceptable sacrifice, Enoch who walked with God, Noah who built an Ark, Abraham who forsook his country and his people and took his son to Mt. Moriah believing that though he was slain and burned on the offering fire God would raise from the dead because He had promised, and then on to the parents of Moses, and the ministry of Moses, the Judges, and across to the Kings, then that innumerable company that the text describes. One thing they had in common, they were all looking unto Jesus. You say, "They didn't know about Jesus." Well this I would question because it is clearly stated here that Moses chose to accept the afflictions of Christ rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season. They were looking to the One that prophets had foretold. They were looking to the One that their types foreshadowed. They were looking to the One that would come, whom their heart demanded. They saw Him afar off, and the valiant things that they accomplished were accomplished because they believed that God Who cannot lie would honor their obedience and their faith. These who are listed in this roster of the faithful are those who believed God for the impossible, for that which had never happened before, and the ground and foundation of their faith was that they were looking unto Jesus.

Thus it becomes the key to everything that the Lord Jesus would do for us, and in us, to us, or through us. He is to be seen as the center of the Christian life. You must recognize that He has provided everything that you need. He is everything that you are not. He can do that that you cannot do. Everything in Jesus, and Jesus everything, thus sang one of days before. And it behooves us, therefore, to look off unto Jesus.

The first thing I suggest is this, that looking *unto Jesus we learn that the Christian life is to be viewed as a race*. We have been enrolled by Him in that which He holds for us in His own choice of an allegory, as a race. First, we find that He Himself was engaged in a race. Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him...The picture is of our Lord Jesus coming into the world, born of the Holy Ghost, given a body like unto our body, accepting the limitations of our humanity, then for those 30 years engaged in living in all of the experiences through which we would pass, and undergoing all the temptations that would ever come to us. But before Him was a joy. What was this joy? What was this goal that saw as He was willing to take off the diadem of His glory, the robes of His majesty, and lay aside the scepter of His power? What was it that made the eternal Son willing to be joined to one cell in the body of Mary, and then to be clothed in a human body and a human personality, and accept the limitations of humanity? Why? Why, I say. It was that He might procure for Himself a people. For as father, He had wanted children; as brother, He had wanted brethren; as bridegroom, He had wanted a bride; and the joy that was set before Him was a ransomed, redeemed, delivered people. And because of this, He was prepared to endure the Cross, and despise the shame, even though from the moment of incarnation He knew that the end of His coming was the Cross, living as Holman Hunt so eloquently pictured in oils that He lived under the shadow of the Cross. Nevertheless He was willing to endure the Cross that He might purchase you unto Himself, that He might redeem you and me from all iniquity, and purify us unto Himself, a peculiar people zealous of good works. But it was not only the agony of the Cross; it was the fact that He was despised and rejected of men. It is hard enough to be rejected; but oh, the added grief of being despised; despised and rejected of men was the Lord Jesus. They spit upon Him. They mocked Him. They cursed Him. They buffeted Him. They put a crown of thorns upon Him, and an abandoned robe upon Him, a broken reed in His hand, and mocked the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, and, He despised the shame. He despised it because it had nothing to be compared with the joy that was set before Him. Then one day in the fullness of time, some of these whose fists had fallen

upon His face and whose greedy fingers had plucked the hair from His face, would fall before Him and worship Him as King of kings, and Lord of lords, and become by His redemptive love part of that company that would reward Him for His suffering. And so He endured the Cross. Yes, a race, but a joy was set before Him, so that for thirty years He was willing to pursue absolute obedience to the Father and then full service to men and ultimately that final sacrifice for our redemption. He was willing to run this race that at the end you might be the reward He received.

We find, not only does the text tell us that our Lord Jesus was engaged in a race, it tells us also that *Old Testament saints were engaged in a race*. And how much more was their responsibility in some sense than ours. How much more faith did it represent for them than for us. We go back, if you please, to Enoch who walked with God; and, though His generation hated him because he loved the Lord, he was prepared by virtue of his obedience to the Lord to walk with until it was more convenient to God just to take home than to let him go back where he had resided. And Noah who for that extended period endured the scoffing, mocking of his generation, as he built the boat on the top of a hill, an immense vessel, capable of all of God's redemptive purpose, and they despised him, but he was perfectly willing to endure this in order that that purpose which God had laid upon his heart be fulfilled. O yes, it was a race for this one to be prepared to stand, to endure, for these decades in order that he might please God. No wonder that Noah is included as one who ran well the race. And then if you wish to view Abraham who for 25 years waited for the promised of the son, how he was prepared to go on with lapse, yes, but nonetheless holding onto the fact that God had said that He would give him a son. Certainly there was a race.

And then if you wish to come down and see the others that God had with Him, and notice what it cost them to serve the Lord. Let me read just a little of the price they paid as they completed the race that was set before them. They quenched the violence of fire, they escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to fight the armies of the enemies, women received their dead raised to life again: and others were tortured, not accepting deliverance; that they might obtain a better resurrection: And others had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment: They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented...

Why? Because they had obtained a good report through faith, even though they had not received that which was promised: Yet they had run the race. And so this company that died in faith, looking for the One that was to come, paid this price in order that they might complete the race to which they had been called of God. This I believe was the company to whom the Lord went during those three days of His death, for it says, "He went and He preached deliverance to those that were in Sheol" (Luk. 4:18). I believe that up unto the time of our Lord's resurrection that the place of the righteous dead was in that department of Sheol that is called Abraham's Bosom, and there they were kept waiting in Paradise until the time should come that the redemption that they had foreseen and which they had trusted was accomplished. And so you we our Lord Jesus go down and tell them, You died not in vain. It was not hopeless, for I have now come and your redemption is accomplished. And He gathered all of these that had died in faith and drew them with Him into His presence, and now we discover that the Scripture says that we are encompassed about with a great cloud of witness. They are there singing the song of Moses and the Lamb, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive riches and honor, and glory. Unto Him who loved us and washed us in His Blood" (Rev. 1:5). Ah they are there. But they are not only there as those who were the first fruits of His redemption love, but they are also there as the viewers of the race in which we are engaged. For the picture that is presented here is this, that from the time you receive the Lord Jesus Christ, you have been engaged in a race. It is as though the world were the arena, and gathered in the balcony, as you are before me this morning, are all the redeemed of all the ages that have run well the race, and there you would find, if you could see with the eyes of faith and Scripture, that Abraham and Isaac, and Jacob are there, and all of the fathers, and all of those that have completed the course are there, and you are running the race not only in the presence of a living generation but your father, and your mother whom you promised to serve the Lord Jesus Christ, have witnessed your walk. Thus teaches the Word. These of other days are looking over the parapet and watching you engaged in this race. This is the Scriptural teaching. You are engaged in a race. The Lord is the Judge, and these are the beholders, the witnesses. They themselves were faithful, even unto death, and that often, the death of the Cross, that they might achieve the reward, that they might please Him who Him who had called them, and now the Lord Jesus has not only gathered them to Himself, but He

has allowed them to become spectators, participating thus, of you completing the course into which you have come. And so we discover that the first thing we find when we look off unto Jesus is that He regards the Christian life as a race.

The second thing our text tells us is that in looking unto Jesus we learn *the conditions for successfully running this race*. This is extremely important that you should realize this. For we are content you know at our own pace. We are content to feel that we are running well, until we look at Him. I am confident that that day in the boat that Peter felt himself to be an exemplary follower of the religion of the fathers, but when he saw the glory of Jesus Christ he fell upon his face there at the shore and cried out, Depart from me. I am a sinful man. Thus it is only in looking unto the Lord Jesus Christ that we can possibly see what we ought to be and how to become what we ought to be. The Scripture text tells us expressly, "Since we are compassed about with a great cloud of witnesses," father and grandparents, and friends that you knew and prayed for you and who loved you that you might serve the Lord, and these of other days that have gone on and are with Him (Heb. 12:1). And then down to the apostles and those who served with Christ, the whole company of the redeemed, gathered in the balcony whereby God allows them to view the race that each generation runs, and there beholding you. Now, they see you engaged in a race, and then they see you allowed to be thrown around you weights. How it must grieve the heart of God, how it must grieve the angels of protection that He sends us, how it must grieve those that have run the race before us to see us allow ourselves to be entangled with that which are called weights. You understand the analogy.

When a man is getting ready to run, he takes off everything that would hinder everything that would put him at a disadvantage, everything that could in any wise keep him from winning the race. Even good gifts of God can sometimes be perverted into weights. For instance, one can discover that their talents are a handicap, for they trust their talents and lean upon their talents rather than upon the Lord. Gifts and great abilities that God gives often become the means where one thinks that he has been responsible for the gift. If you have through some combination of genes acquired great ability in some field, it is just as great folly for you to think yourself to be something because of the contribution that others of other days have made as it is for one to think himself something because of the race into which he has come. You have nothing to do with either. And yet it is quite possible for one's very gift to become an impediment, Abilities that one has secured through discipline and training often can become a weight for if they are not recognized, and honored, and used to the degree to which we feel they should they can sometimes become a hindrance. Family connections, as grateful as one ought to be for them, often can be a weight that will hinder our running the race that is set before us. For there again we often we recognize that the Lord has called us to Himself, and in doing this we have now achieved a family status that is above and beyond all others. What is there higher than being a child of God? And yet how often it is family connections can actually stand in the way and become hindrances to our serving faithfully the Lord Jesus. Prosperity, business, ambition can sometimes become the means whereby our lives are in peril in the successful pursuit of the race.

It behooves us, therefore, to recognize that the good gifts of God are to be held as His, yea even laid in His hand lest they should become impediments to us. Care and concern, even good and kind care, sorrow for those that are in need, and affections as well, these things which are of themselves good, and honored and used of God, can, if they are not kept before Him and in His nail pierced hands, become weights to us. And so, when we think of weights, let us view this, that we deserve nothing until we have laid it in His hands. We own nothing until we have given it to Him. We can have nothing until we want Him more and than that which we would have means so little to us. Oh, that we might let nothing become a weight to us in this thing. The very desk that you have, of talent, of gift, or ability, of family, of prosperity, of business, of ambition, of care, of sorrow, of affection, the finest that you have, lay it in His nail-pierced hands lest it should be a weight too heavy for you to carry in the race that you are called to run.

But then we discover it is not only weights, but it is also sins. The implication is sins which beset us. That word beset means, to surround. The best picture that you would get of the Greek idea is of an octopus that puts its tentacles around the throat and the head, and the arm and the leg, and with suction and pressure seeks to crush and to destroy. And this is what sin is said to do to us, wraps itself around, it would strangle, it would crush. Now the Scripture says, Lay aside these sins. And we are to view thus that sin becomes the greatest impediment in this race we are called to run. First, the first thing that sin does, as we read, it puts God against us, for as a just God even though we are His children he can no longer bless us, and He must chasten us. For were to allow the sin to go unchastened He would disown us and declare that we are not His. Oh, a thousand times better to

be chastened of God than to be disowned by Him. But how a thousand times better than that is to have dealt with it in such a way that His chastening need not fall. For this which would impede us is the fact - puts God against us in chastisement. And then, of course, sin also puts Satan at us in attack. For when you allow sin in your life, you have permitted that to which has caused Satan to be cast out of heaven, and in all justice and fairness God thus has to declare to the enemy of your soul that by your choice you have exposed yourself to his work. You cannot afford sin. We cannot afford to allow it in our lives because it puts Satan at us with talent and fang, to do everything he can. Thus the Scripture warns us, "Give no place to the devil" (Eph. 4:27). For if we give it, he certainly will take it.

And then the 3rd thing that sin does is put others from us. It separates. It separates and it breaks fellowship, and it hurts and it injures. And so it says, Lay aside every weight, and the sins which puts God against us in chastisement, and Satan upon us in attack, and others from us in fellowship.

This is the most frequent burden that the Christians find. Oh, how easily it besets us. Sometimes it is nature. Sometimes is environment. Sometimes it is general pressure and temptation. Sometimes it is a particular sin. Perhaps in your case (you know) the particular inward lust that is rocking your frame by nature. Or, you may even know that there is some evil that is cited by the circumstances and the company, or your employment, but something is there in your life. Whatever it is, whether it is pride or passion, whether it is desire or deed, whether it is covetousness or uncleanness, whether it is sloth or intemperance, whether it is unbelief or impenitence, whether it is self-righteousness or self-dependence, it must be put away. The only way we will ever see the thing that grieves Him is to see Him. And thus the text says, Looking Unto Jesus.

For it is as we gaze upon Him that the little things that seem so unimportant are revealed to be the foxes which tear down the vines and eat the grapes. None of us rightly understand ourselves until we look unto Jesus. But the moment that we see Him as He would be revealed by the Spirit of God through the Word to our hearts, then the things which were not important become altogether important, and they must be dealt with. If you have been looking at yourself, then you are depressed almost beyond retrieving. If you have been looking at others, then you are proud, for you have found something in anyone that you have not done or been and thus you can judge yourself by others and find content in it. But, my friend, if you look at Jesus, just look at Him, then the criticism of others will be stopped, and the depression of yourself will be stopped, for in the revelation of the beauty and the holiness of the Son of God every mouth is stopped, and all we can see is our own world of iniquity and unworthiness. Looking unto Jesus is where revival comes. For then we see ourselves. Look unto others, look to yourself, nothing but despair or pride, but look to Jesus and everything is righted, for He then reveals all that grieves Him. He does not seek to bludgeon or bruise. His purpose is not to hurt. He does not want to do that. He loves you. And a child — the father does not beat his child to bruise him, to break his limbs, or wreck his life, but only to correct. And so if you look unto Jesus you will see that which is a weight to be put away, and a sin to be put away. But looking unto Jesus not only shows us the Christian life as a race, and a rule by which we may run it successfully, but looking unto Jesus shows us that He has provided everything that we need to successfully complete that race, and to persevere in it.

Are you not challenged today by the presence of these? Can you for a moment allow your mind's eye to go back to the fact that your fathers and your mothers, long with the Lord, are viewing you, that these of other days are watching you, that the apostles of all ages — we are compassed about with a great cloud of witnesses. They have watched you. Oh, you thought you did it alone. You did not. They were watching. You thought you did it alone. You thought, you said it when no one could hear. They were listening. They were the spectators. You say, Is this so? Well the Scripture says, We are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses. They are watching you run the race.

I wonder if they are not looking at you today with grief, heartache. He treasures the prayers of the saints in the bottle of His remembrance. The fact that your godly father or mother, friend, or teacher, years ago died and is with the Lord has not changed anything. Those prayers are remembered by God, who lives in the eternal now. It seems to me that when you discover that you are compassed about with a cloud of spectators, these who have already faithfully run the course, and when you see the Lord Jesus before you as the author of your faith with One who quickens you to come to Him, and the perfecter, the completer, the fulfiller of your faith, and you realize that He is enough for every need and task, adequate for everything that He has called you to do, then it seems to me that it shouldn't be too hard for us to lay aside every weight.

How do you lay them aside. The Word is clear. The first thing you do is to look at Him, and looking at Him see yourself, the weight, the sin, and then when you have seen it, you confess it, and know the cleansing of His Blood. You forsake it, you judge it to be what He says it is. And then you testify to His cleansing. Let me repeat it. When you discover a weight, or you discover sin in your life, the procedure that God has given is this For if you agree with God that what He says is so, you judge it to be what He said it is. Then of course you forsake it, for there is no forgiveness unless you forsake it. And then you confess it. You say with God what God says. You confess it. And thirdly you testify to His cleansing, to His forgiveness, to His pardon, not to yourself and your humility, but to His grace and to His goodness. And this is how it is put aside. Let us lay it aside. You cannot just forget it. It has to be dealt with. He has prescribed how. But there are warnings. Hear them now.

There is the warning of chastisement, there is the warning of His commandment. Listen to Hebrews 12, verse 15. "Looking diligently, lest any man fail of the grace of God, lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you and thereby many be defiled." And "looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God." God has provided grace for cleansing, grace for deliverance, grace for pardon, but He has not provided grace for the impenitent, the unbeliever, nor the unbroken. And, "looking diligently, lest any man should fail of the grace of God." Hear our text, "Looking Unto Jesus, the Author and the Finisher of our Faith." You get your eye on Him you will see yourself, and you will see that weight, and that sin, and then you will see His wounded hands, His nail-pierced hands and sword riven side, and see there is cleansing and pardon and forgiveness. Oh, dear heart, hear it today. Looking unto Jesus, the author, the finisher of our faith. Shall we bow in prayer?

Looking unto Jesus, we discover the Christian life is a race. Looking unto Jesus, we discover that if we are to run that race we must lay aside every weight, and lay aside every sin. Looking unto Jesus we discover that there is a great company of people watching us to see whether or not we are going to avail ourselves of His grace, partake of His cleansing, His power, and His goodness. They have already completed the course. They are watching us. We have His commandment. We have His Word. And then we have His warning. "Looking diligently, lest any man should fail of the grace of God." Oh, He offers pardon, He offers cleansing, He offers restoration. Looking unto Jesus. Oh, look diligently this morning that we are "looking unto Jesus, the author, the finisher of our faith."

Father, keep our eyes fixed upon Thy Son. May we see Him and no other beside. Oh, that our eyes of our hearts would be open to behold Him. Come upon us, blessed Father, by the Holy Ghost. Dispel the gloom, the fog, the cloud, the smoke, all of the illusions, the self-deceptions, everything, Lord, and help us to see the Lord Jesus. This we must have, Father, if we are to please Him and be right with Him, glorify Thee. So we pray that just now the Holy Spirit will show us that this is the source of cleansing, the source of strength, the source of wisdom, the Lord Jesus is everything. All in all in Jesus, everything in Jesus, our wonderful, wonderful Lord. May we see Him thus? May He fill the horizon of our hearts and become to us more wonderful than all else beside. "Jesus, Jesus, Jesus, sweetest name I know fills my every longing, keeps me singing as I go.¹" Grant it may be so, Lord, because of confession and brokenness and cleansing, and purging, and power, and strength, and life, fellowship and truth.

Let us stand for the Benediction. "And now may the God of peace that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant make us perfect in every good work to do His will, working in us that which is wellpleasing in His sight through Jesus Christ our Lord to whom be the glory now and forever. Amen" (Heb. 13:20-21).

* Reference such as: Delivered at The Gospel Tabernacle Church, New York City on Sunday Morning, January 28, 1962 by Paris W. Reidhead, Pastor.

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1 "He Keeps Me Singing" By Luther B. Bridgers, 1910.