

Faith is Looking to Jesus

By Henry Mahan

Bible Text: Hebrews 12:1-3

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My message today will be taken from the book of Hebrews chapter 12. I will be speaking from Hebrews 12 verses one through three. I have a simple title, a very simple title. But the message is one of the most important truths that you can hear. The subject today is, "Faith is Looking to Jesus." Very simple. But that is the heart and essence of faith is looking to Christ Jesus.

Now Hebrews chapter 12 verse one begins with these words. "Wherefore seeing that we are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses..." Now notice each word. "So great a cloud of witnesses." The word "great" is used for their number. Never think of anything relating to the kingdom of God in small numbers. In the Scriptures it talks about 10,000 times 10,000 and thousands and thousands. It talks about a number which no man can number. It talks about people out of every tribe and kindred and nation and tongue under heaven, so great a cloud of witnesses.

And then it says a cloud. "Wherefore, brethren, seeing that we are compassed about with so great a cloud..." They are above us. They are not here on the earth around us. But they are above us. They are heavenly witnesses.

Paul has been talking about them in the preceding chapter, chapter 11, this great crowd of witnesses. They are heavenly witnesses. And in chapter 11 he talks about Abel, "By faith Abel offered a more excellent sacrifice than Cain." He talks about Enoch, "By faith Enoch walked with God and he was not for God took him. He had this testimony that he pleased God." He talks about Noah. "By faith Noah being warned of God of things not seen prepared an ark to the saving of his house." He talks about Sarah how that she conceived and bore a child in her old age by faith. He talks about Moses. "By faith Moses refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter." On and on and on.

In chapter 11 the apostle Paul talks about these great people of faith, people who believed God, people who received the promises, people who were persuaded of the promises and people who embraced the promises and who died in faith.

So when he comes to chapter 12...now that is the 11th chapter: Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Sarah, Moses, David...all of these great men of faith who believed God. And he says that they are witnesses, a cloud...so great a cloud of witnesses. In other words these glorified believers of other generations are in heaven in the presence of God. And they

are witnesses. But they are not watching us. They are not witnessing our activities or looking on our activities. They are his witnesses. This great cloud of witnesses are his witnesses. They are witnesses of the grace of God and of the goodness of God and of the glory of God.

And what is a witness? Well, a witness is one who has seen and heard and experienced a fact. And all of these who embraced the promises and believed God and died in faith, they are witnesses, first of all, of the faithfulness of God. And they are witnesses of the fullness of his divine love. And they are witnesses of the sufficiency of his blood. And they are witnesses of the victory of faith.

It is like Paul said, "Thanks be unto God who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

Their life on earth is over. And they have folded up this frail tent and they are gone to be with God. They have entered into the presence of the Lord and they are...they have received that dwelling place and that building not made with hands eternal in the heavens. And those are the people he is talking about. He says, "Wherefore, brethren, seeing that we are compassed about with so great, innumerable..."

God told Abraham, "As the stars of the sky, as the sands of the seashore," innumerable company of believers, great cloud of witnesses. They are not witnessing what we are doing. They are not watching us. They are not interested in the things here. They are with God. They are in the presence of the Lord. But they are witnesses of his faithfulness, of his love, of his grace, of his goodness and of the victory of faith.

But now we are still on this earth. We are walking on this earth. We are encompassed about, encircled with this great cloud of witnesses, but he goes on and he says, "Wherefore seeing that we are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us who are still on this earth, let us lay aside every weight, every weight."

What is he talking about? Well, Paul is using here as an illustration a man...runners running a race, running a race. And he said, "Now, to run this race you got to lay aside every weight. You have got to lay aside every hindrance that would keep you from running a good race and every hindrance and every association and every companion and every interest which interferes with your fellowship with God. And you are walking with God. Lay those things aside.

You see, when people are running a race, when men are running in a race they don't wear boots. And they don't wear overcoats. And they don't carry burdens on their backs. They put off all these things that would hinder them, that would keep them from giving their best, doing their best, running their best. And that is what he is talking about here. Let us who are on this earth, still in this race, still in this walk, still in this life of faith, let's lay aside those things that hinder our fellowship with God and hinder our walk with God.

In fact, one writer said one time he that would avoid the flu, he that would avoid the flu must not run around with people who have the flu. So that is what he is talking about. Let's lay aside every weight, every weight.

And what's the second thing he says? "And let us lay aside the sin which doth so easily beset us, the sin which does so easily beset us."

Now some writers believe that Paul is talking there about personal weakness or some particular infirmity that an individual has. Let's lay aside every...the sin which does so easily beset us. But I don't think he is talking about personal weaknesses at all. I believe he is talking about the sin which is a problem to everybody. What is the sin that would be a problem for every human being, every believer no matter male or female, old or young, rich or poor, learned or ignorant? It doesn't...whomever. What would be the sin? Let us lay aside the sin.

I'll tell you what it is. It is lack of faith. It is unbelief. That is the sin which does so easily beset all of us. You know, the apostle said to the Lord Jesus, "Lord, increase our faith." The Roman centurion said, "Lord, I do believe, but help thou mine unbelief." He is talking about that sin. And I think I can make good on that.

What is the preceding chapter about? It is about faith. Abel by faith, Noah by faith, Enoch by faith, Abraham by faith...it is talking about faith. That is what the preceding chapter is all about. What is the one mark of everybody listed in that chapter, the one distinguishing characteristic? Faith. What brought each one of them to victory? Faith, believing God. What kept the others out of the land of Canaan? Unbelief.

And the Scripture says, "If you can believe all things are possible to them who believe."

The Scripture says, "Without faith it is impossible to please God."

The Scripture says, "Take heed, brethren, lest there be found in you an evil heart of unbelief."

The Scripture says, "He that believeth on the Son hath life and he that believeth not shall not see life."

So what would this sin be? It would be the sin of unbelief. "Take heed, brethren, lest there be found in you an evil heart of unbelief."

So wherefore seeing we are compassed about with so great, innumerable company of witnesses, let's lay aside all these weights, hindrances and associations and companions and habits and things like that that would hinder us running a good race, walking with God, walking the walk of faith. And let's especially, let's especially lay aside the sin which doth so easily beset us, which comes so naturally. And that is the sin of unbelief.

And then he says, “And let us run with patience the race that is set before us.” This race is my race. This course is my course. It is my life on this earth.

Paul described it in Acts 20. He said, “None of the difficulties of life, none of the trials of life move me, disturb me. Neither count I this life, this human life overly important so that I may finish my course, my course, my race, so that I may finish my race with joy and the ministry which I have received of the Lord. Lay aside every weight and especially that sin of unbelief which does so easily beset us and let’s run our own race that’s set before me.”

Who set it before me? God gave it to me. God gave me this life. God gave me this course to run. God gave me this responsibility that I have. God gave me this particular task that he has laid into my life. God gave me this family. God gave me my children. God gave me those things. This is my course that he has set for me.

Now let’s run it with patience, with patience.

Does the way seem hard sometimes? Well, he said, “My grace is sufficient. My grace is sufficient.” It was hard for Paul. But God told him, he said, “My grace is sufficient.”

Does the course sometimes seem lonely? He said, “I’ll never leave you. I’ll never forsake you. Lo, I am with you always.”

Does the way seem mysterious and perplexing? It does to me. Doesn’t it to you? Perplexing, mysterious. Well, God moves in mysterious ways his wonders to perform. He plants his footsteps on the sea and rides upon the storm. Judge not the Lord by feeble sense, but trusting for his power. The bud may have a bitter taste, but sweet will be the flower. Run this race with patience.

Does the way bring trials and tears? Of course it will. Of course it does. But we know that all things work together for good to them who love God, who are called according to his purpose.

Hebrews 10 Paul cautions us. Listen. He says, “Run this race with patience now. Wait on God.”

David said one time, he said, “I had...I would have fainted had I not believed to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living.”

But Paul says in Hebrews 10, “Cast not away your faith. Cast not away your confidence in him. Faith has great recompense of reward. You have neither patience. Yet a little while you will come. Now the just shall live by faith, but if any man draw back, if any man draw back, if any man resigns, quits the race, falls out, my soul has no pleasure in him. But we are not of them who draw back unto condemnation. We are of them who believe to the saving of the soul.”

Do I still have your attention? I hope so. Listen. “Wherefore, seeing we are encircled with so great a cloud of witnesses, those who have gone before, those who have proven the goodness of God, great cloud of witnesses, witnesses. Let’s lay aside every weight and especially the sin of unbelief which does so easily beset us and let us run with patience the race that is set before us.”

Now here is the root of the whole matter, verse two. Here is the root of the whole matter. “Looking unto Jesus, looking unto Jesus Christ our Lord who is the author and finisher of our faith who for the joy that was set before him...” What’s that joy? To redeem a people, to save his people from their sins. “Who for the joy set before him endured the cross, the death of the cross, the suffering of the cross, the agony of the cross, despising the shame, and he sat down at the right hand of God, looking to Jesus.”

Well, we don’t look to the Lord Jesus with these natural eyes, do we? Of course not. We have never seen him with the natural eyes. But we look to him with the eye of faith. And he is the object of our faith. We see him. Yeah, we do see him. The Bible keeps saying over and over he that seeth the Son and believeth on him, he that seeth the Son and believeth on him. Well, we see him in the promises of Scripture. We see him in the flesh as our representative when he walks this earth. We see that, the testimony and the record God’s given us in the Word. We see him on the cross as our substitute. We see him risen from the tomb as our justifier. We see him on the right hand of God as our mediator. Yes, we do see him by faith.

And looking unto him, we look to Christ, he is not only the object of our faith, he is the author and finisher of our faith.

What does that mean the author? Well a person who is the author of a book, the book was planned by him and proposed by him and written by him. He is the author of the book. He is the beginning and end. And our salvation, our faith, Christ is the author. He is the author and finisher. He said, “I am the alpha and omega.” That’s the beginning and the end. He said, “I am the first and the last.” He planned our salvation, planned it in grace and mercy before the world began, covenant of grace, everlasting covenant. He planned it, chose us, loved us with an everlasting love.

He executed our salvation. He came down to this earth. He grew up as a tender plant, as a root out of a dry ground, a root out of a dry ground, as a tender plant. And he was despised and rejected of men and he went to the cross and bore our sins in his body on the tree. He executed salvation. He accomplished it. And he applied it. He called us by his grace. And he sustains it. We are kept by the power of God through faith and he will perfect it. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with a voice of the archangel. And the trump of God shall sound and the dead in Christ shall rise.

So looking unto Jesus he is the object of faith. He is the author and finisher of our faith who for the joy set before him endured the cross and despised the shame for it became him, it became him for whom are all things and by whom are all things in bringing many

sons and daughters unto glory to make the captain of their salvation perfect through suffering.

Now then verse four says, “And consider him. And consider him. And let us not be weary and discouraged in welling doing and faint in our minds.” Look to Christ. Look to Christ.

This is the whole of faith, looking to Jesus is the whole of faith. You can read a dozen books on the subject of faith and you will find that faith comes down three words, looking unto Jesus. That’s right. That is the whole of faith, looking to Christ, looking to Christ, looking to Christ as the object of faith, as the author and finisher of faith.

And this is the whole of acceptance with God. 1 John 5:11 says, “This is the record. God has given us eternal life. This life is in his Son. And he that hath the Son hath life. And he that hath not the son hath not life. This is my beloved Son. Hear ye him.”

You see, looking to Christ, that’s the whole of faith. And that is the whole of acceptance with God and that is the whole of spiritual life. “I am come that they might have life and have it more abundantly. I am the way, the truth and the life. No man cometh to the Father but by me.”

Listen to this Scripture. “When Christ who is our life shall appear then shall we appear with him in glory.” The whole of spiritual life is in Christ, through Christ, by Christ and for the glory of Christ. It is to know him. That is what he said in John 17. “Eternal life is to know God and Jesus Christ whom he hath sent, to know him.” And this is the whole of hope is looking to Christ. You want a thesis on hope? It won’t take three or four pages. You want a thesis on hope? Here it is. Three words: Christ in you. That is the hope of glory. That’s the hope of glory. That is the essence of life. That is all in the acceptance with God. That is the whole of spiritual life. That is the hope of heaven. And that is the whole of heaven is looking to Christ.

“I go to prepare a place for you. I go and prepare a place for you. I will come again and receive you unto myself that where I am there you may be also.” Looking to Jesus.

All right. Let me close with this. Wherefore, brethren, seeing that e are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses. That’s those who have gone before, those who have witnessed a witness to God’s grace and love and mercy and goodness and faithfulness and victory in Christ. Let’s lay aside every weight, every hindrance, especially the sin of unbelief. Lay it aside. And run with patience and commitment and perseverance our particular race, the race set before us, given us by God, looking to Jesus, looking to him. He is the object of faith, the sole object. He is the author and finisher of faith. He is the author and finisher of our salvation. He is our salvation. He is our hope of life. He is our heaven.

So looking to Christ and not to how much faith I have. Now you don’t want to look to your faith. You don’t want to look in. you want to look out. You want to look up. You

want to look to him. Don't...looking...faith is looking to Christ, not looking to my faith. It is not faith that saves. It is Christ that saves. It is not faith that died for me. It is Christ that died for me.

So whether I have little faith or great faith or much faith or not much faith that is not the issue. It is in whom...it is whom do I believe. That's it. You say, "I know whom I have believed." So look to him, not to your faith.

And then it is looking to Jesus and not to my prayers and not to my worship, not to my meditations. It is looking to Christ.

Now we do pray and we meditate. We do worship God. But I don't look to those things for comfort or for confidence or for assurance. I look to him. He is my salvation. And then it is looking to Christ and not to the name I wear. I don't know about all these names that identify us in this day. Christian is a pretty good name. The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch. But it is not the name I wear. It is not the doctrines I hold. It is when I believed depends on whom I believe.

Now you write that down. What I believe depends on whom I believe. That...Paul didn't say I know what I believe. He said, "I know whom." He didn't even say I know when I believed. He said, "I know whom I have believed. I am persuaded he is able to keep that which I have committed to him against that day. It is looking to Jesus and not to the law.

I love God's law. I delight in God's law and I know all who believe delight in God's law. David said he delighted in God's law. But the law commands, but it doesn't give any strength to obey. And the law wounds, but it never heals. The law condemns, but it never comforts. Christ is our strength. He is our righteousness. He is our comfort.

So this faith is looking to Christ not to the law. And it is looking to Christ and not to his mother. It is looking to Christ and not to his disciples, not Saint Peter, Saint Paul, Saint John or Saint Jude. It is looking to Christ and not any of his apostles. There is one God, one mediator between God and me, the man Christ Jesus. Faith is looking to Jesus and not to our brethren, not the worst of them or the best of them. That's right, not to the best of them, not to the worst of them.

You know, when Paul described true believers he said true believers are those who worship God in the Spirit and who rejoice in Christ Jesus and who have no confidence in this flesh. We don't have any confidence in our own flesh or anybody else's flesh. Folks always said, "Well, its hypocrites in the church. Sure. They are using every profession and every organization."

But I am not looking to my brethren. I am looking to Christ. He is perfect. You can find fault with the Church members, but you can't find any fault with our Lord. It is looking to Christ and not to my brethren. Faith is looking to Christ and not to my own strength or my weakness. If I have any strength at all it is not mine. It is his. If I have any gifts they are not mine. They are God given. If I have any knowledge he gave it to me. So it is not

looking to my strength. I hope to grow in grace, but growth...I am not looking to my growth. I am looking to Christ, looking to Christ. And not to my weakness. Actually when I am really truly weak that is when I am strong. That is what Paul said. "When I am weak then am I strong."

It is looking to Jesus and not to my works, not to my preaching, not to my singing, not to my witnessing, not to my writing. It is looking to Christ, not to my works.

You know, some of these people are going to hold onto their works until they get to the judgment. You hear them saying, "Lord, we preached. We did many wonderful works. We cast out devils."

He said, "I never knew you."

If they looked to him instead of those works he would have owned them. It is looking to Christ. When? Yesterday, today, tomorrow and forever. Never stop looking. Never stop coming, stop coming to Christ. Never stop trusting. Never stop depending. Never stop looking to him and him alone. It is looking to Jesus, compassed about so great a cloud of witnesses. Let's lay aside these weights especially unbelief. Let's run with patience the race set before us looking to Jesus, looking to Jesus.

And when clouds of death around me roll and when his angels come for my soul, no need to remind me of this special grace because then I will be looking to Jesus face to face.

Until then, look to Jesus. That is faith is looking to Christ.

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