

The following sermon was preached at Redemption Baptist Church on Sunday, 5 June 2022. We encourage you to look up the Scriptures that are referenced, and see the context for yourself. May the Lord speak to your heart as you study His Word.

Are Your Eyes on Jesus?

Hebrews 12:1-3

Every year in late November, I am disgusted to see the videos that are taken in American department stores on “Black Friday.” Driven by greed and selfishness, many people behave like animals on that day. As soon as the doors to the department stores are open, the crowds trample into the stores as though they were fighting for their very lives. Within seconds, people are pushing, shoving, and sometimes literally trampling underfoot anyone who gets in their way. Oftentimes people knock down stands, tear things from the shelves, and get into fistfights with other customers, all in order to get “stuff” that they want. Tragically, people sometimes even die as they are trampled underfoot.

Of course, covetousness is not an American phenomenon. It is a *universal* phenomenon, because it is a condition of the sinful human heart. Our Irish culture is no less greedy than American culture is. Not so long ago, people were spending huge money that they didn’t have in order to build gargantuan houses and sporty new cars that they didn’t need; but then the housing bubble burst, and many people were suddenly mired in debt. Yet, in the midst of the economic pain, was our love of “stuff” curtailed? No. People continued to plop down thousands of euros that they didn’t have in order to put on big parties, and to take lavishly expensive holidays. Now that we are suffering under a very painful new recession, there are many people who are so depressed by the lower “standard of living,” that they are losing their desire to live. Tragically, there are many people who would rather “check out” of this life than to do without the comforts of this world that they once knew.

Jesus told His followers, *“Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, wherewithal shall we be clothed? (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things.”* Think of that! If even basic necessities of life, such as food, drink, and clothing, are not to be sought after by God’s people, then what *should* we be seeking? Upon what *should* our eyes be focused?

In our passage of Scripture this morning, we will find the answer to that question. In the first three verses of **Hebrews 12**, Paul likens the Christian life to a race. Just as an Olympic runner must keep his eyes fixed on the finish line, so the Christian must keep his eyes fixed on the Lord Jesus Christ. Things of this earth must not distract our attention, or weigh us down. Even the true necessities of life must not be the object of our thoughts and attention. **At all times, the Christian must keep his eyes on Jesus Christ.**

The title of this morning’s message is *Are Your Eyes on Jesus?*

Read Hebrews 12:1-3.

As you run the race of your Christian life, there are several things you must consider. First of all, you must...

I. Consider the witnesses.

Paul begins his analogy of the “race” of the Christian life with an interesting statement. He says, “*Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses.*” Now, what does Paul mean by this? Just who are these people in this “*cloud of witnesses,*” and in what sense are they “*witnesses*”? Many Christians assume that Paul is talking about departed saints in heaven. Many of us have been taught that the saints in Heaven are like “spectators,” looking down from their “heavenly grandstand,” “witnessing” our lives, and cheering on the believers on earth who are still running their Christian race.

Now, this certainly is a dramatic mental image, and it makes for “good preaching”; but it doesn’t fit the context of this passage. I don’t doubt that the saints in Heaven *are* able to see what is going on down on earth, as God allows them; but that isn’t what Paul is talking about in **Hebrews 12:1**. You’ll notice that Paul started the sentence with “*Wherefore.*” By using this word, he is hearkening back to what he was just talking about in **Hebrews 11**. And what *did* Paul talk about in **chapter 11**? He reminded us of the *faith* of many believers in the Old Testament. He spent all that time talking about the faith of Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Joshua, Rahab, Gideon, Barak, Samson, David, Samuel, Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, Abed-nego, Elijah, Elisha, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and many others, in order to demonstrate that *we, too* can live *our* lives by faith, and obtain a “*good report.*”

This “*cloud of witnesses,*” then, is not an unseen host of departed believers who are observing and witnessing *our* lives; rather, it is a host of faithful believers of old, whose faithful lives are recorded for us in Scripture. God wants us to witness *their* lives. It is *they* who are witnesses to *us*. Their lives stand as a “witness” and testimony to God’s faithfulness. Their lives witness to the fact that God can bring about true righteousness in our lives, even though we are undeserving sinners--*if* we will simply trust Him, live by faith, and let Him have His way. Their lives witness to the fact that God can give His people the strength and endurance to run the race well, even through the severest of trials--*if* they will simply trust Him.

An Olympic runner wouldn’t think of running the Marathon without studying and examining past winners of the Olympic medal. He looks at their performances and asks, “How did *they* do it? What exercises, disciplines, and mental attitude did *they* employ to get themselves to the point where they could win a 26-mile race?” Likewise, no Christian should run the Christian race without examining the lives of God’s people, as they are recorded in the Scriptures. God recorded their acts of faith so that we could have ample demonstration of how to place *our* faith in the Lord. (God also recorded their failures, so that we could be warned of those things that *hinder* our faith.)

Is there some “secret” to spiritual success that these “heroes of old” were fortunate enough to stumble upon? No. There is no “secret” to spiritual success, because there is nothing “secret” about it. God has plainly shown us how we can exercise victorious faith. Here is the scriptural reason for their success, laid out in plain words.

Read Colossians 3:16

Read James 4:5-10.

When a Christian lets the “*Word of Christ*” dwell in him richly, that indwelling Word changes the believer from the inside out! Paul said in **Romans 10:17**, “*So then faith cometh by*

hearing, and hearing by the word of God.” This truth applies not just at the moment of salvation, but throughout the Christian life. As the Word of God becomes imbedded in the Christian’s heart, it gives him power to have even more faith! The words of God are *living* words, because they precede forth from the living Word Himself--the Lord Jesus Christ. *He* is the Source of faith for every child of God. *He* gives His saints power to trust Him more, and to live lives of continual repentance and submission. These graces are available to every child of God daily, if they will only ask for them. Christian, fill your mind and heart with God’s Word, and draw nigh to Him. If you will draw nigh to Him, He will draw nigh to you. He will give you the faith you need to follow Him, and will enable your heart to submit to Him; and as you submit to Him, He will perform His will *through* you.

God has given us many witnesses. The testimonies of these godly men and women still stand to this day; and it is all recorded for us in this Book. Consider these witnesses, Christian. Read God’s Word every day, and fill your mind with their godly reports. These people were not sinless; but their lives did show a consistent pattern of enduring faith. The record of their lives shows that it *is* possible to run the Christian race well, and to finish with a “victor’s crown.”

Now, not only do we need to consider the “witnesses”: we also need to...

II. Consider the weights.

The next thing to consider as you run the Christian race is the matter of what might be weighing you down. In the last half of **Hebrews 12:1**, Paul goes on to say, **“Let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us.”** According to Paul, there are two enemies that can hinder the Christian race: and every Christian *must* lay them aside. These two enemies are: weights, and besetting sins.

First, **God’s people must consider the weights in their lives.** Now, what is a “weight,” exactly? A “weight” is **anything in your life that distracts you from doing God’s will.** It doesn’t have to be something that is sinful in and of itself. It’s just something that occupies your thoughts, draws your eyes away from the Lord, and thus becomes an object of preoccupation, and even of worship. It eclipses your love for the Lord, and your desire to bring glory to Him.

A runner in a race doesn’t carry around a backpack with snacks, books, picnic supplies, and electronic toys, so that he can take a nice, long, fun, comfortable, leisurely stroll, and get to the finish line whenever he feels up to it. That’s not why he is there! He is there for one purpose—to run the race, finish first, and win glory for his country. In order to accomplish that goal, he wears light clothing, and carries nothing on his person.

Unfortunately, when it comes to the *Christian* race, many believers are so weighed down, that they can barely stand up, much less run. They are carrying around enormous loads, which are filled with all manner of things of this world. The contents of their load may be a television program, an x-box, movies, or DVD’s. It may be a computer; a laptop; a smart phone; an i-pad; or video games. It may be football, or rugby, or sports in general. It may be clothing; a car; a house; money; savings accounts, schooling; a dream job, or a prospective career. It may be following the news, or reading materials other than the Bible. (Again, it may not be *bad*

material; but if you put it above God's Word, it is a "weight" that is keeping you from serving God.) It may be a preoccupation with physical fitness, to the point of worship. (A good litmus test of whether it has become "worship" is whether it keeps you from being in church, or reading your Bible!) It may be favourite hobbies, or even talents, which you refuse to surrender to the Lord's use. Perhaps you refuse to be used of the Lord in the way that *He* wants to use you, because you think that it is beneath you. You insist that the Lord *must* use your talent, and in the way that *you* think it should be used. Perhaps there are loved ones or family whom you place above the Lord. Not being in God's house because relatives are in town, or because you are doing something special with your own family, is always a good indicator of where your heart really is. Jesus said, "***He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.***"

There are a thousand things that are harmless, necessary, or even *good*, in and of themselves, which can weigh a Christian down, and keep his eyes off Christ. What is weighing *you* down, Christian? If you desire to bring honour to your King in the race that you are running, you must consider that question. Perhaps you're wondering, "How do I *know* if something is weighing me down?" The litmus test is quite simple: Is it keeping you from serving God? Does it steal your time, and your passion for the Lord? Does it hinder you from reading your Bible, or spending time with God in prayer? Does it keep you from going to God's house? Does it fill your mind all the time, so that you rarely think or meditate upon God's Word, and the things of God? If so, throw it aside! If it be **fear** that preoccupies your thoughts, ask God to cast out that fear, and increase your faith. If it be **misplaced love** (such as loving family more than loving God), or a **misplaced priority** (such as thinking only of advancing your career or making more money), then repent of it, and ask God to rekindle your love for Him. If there be a **physical object** that is stealing your time, or even corrupting you, then throw it away or destroy it, if you must! Jesus Christ *must* be first in your life!

In **Luke 9**, we are told about a man who came to Jesus and said, "***Lord, I will follow thee; but let me first go bid them farewell, which are at home at my house.***" Jesus' reply to the man was, "***No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.***" What did Jesus mean? Was He telling this man that he wasn't saved? No, not necessarily. This man was probably a genuine believer; but he didn't fully understand the urgency of Christ's mission. He didn't understand how short a time Christ had to prepare people's hearts for the Kingdom of God. Above all, he didn't understand the level of commitment that was needed in order for him to be "fit" for service in that Kingdom.

You see, that word "***fit***" simply means "well-placed." Jesus is saying that as long as you have your eyes on Him, you will be "well-placed" in God's Kingdom. However, whenever you take your eyes *off* the Lord, you are *not* "well-placed" in God's Kingdom. Why? Because you are swerving aside to follow things of this world. When a farmer is ploughing his field, he must keep his eyes, and his attention, on some kind of marker at the end of the field; otherwise, he will swerve to the side, and the row will not be straight. A person who is driving down the road must keep his eye straight ahead on the road; otherwise, he will start to swerve in the direction of the thing he is looking at, and may end up in a deadly accident. Likewise, Christians who are looking at things of this world will *not* run a straight course; and they will *not* be fit for service, or "approved" unto God.

Read 1 Corinthians 9:24-27.

In this passage, Paul is, once again, using a “race” analogy. Paul loved this analogy, because it is a powerful picture of the Christian life. A runner must stay physically fit and disciplined. He doesn’t give in to the cravings of his body for rest, or for sweet or fatty food; and he must do his exercises every day, whether he feels like it or not. Otherwise, he will run the race poorly. Likewise, a Christian must not allow fleshly desires to keep him from reading God’s Word, praying, spreading the Gospel, and doing the things that God has commanded. Otherwise, he will put on carnal “fat,” which will weigh him down in the race. And what is the result? The result is that he will be a “castaway.” This doesn’t mean that he loses his *salvation*; it means that in his *service* to God, he is *adokimos*—literally, “not approved.”

As runners in God’s “marathon,” we must “*lay aside every weight.*” However, weights are not the only thing that we must lay aside. We must also lay aside “*the sin which doth so easily beset us.*” “*Weights*” are things that are not necessarily wrong in themselves; but “*sins*” are things that *are* wrong in and of themselves—things that God has forbidden. Christian, there is no place for a “pet sin” in your life. If there be a sin that easily “besets” you, you know what it is. It is that “designer sin”—that sin to which *you* are especially prone. Don’t pat yourself on the back because you are not tempted by certain sins; instead, be on guard for the sins that *do* tempt you! Don’t call the sin in your life a “mistake”: call it what it is—rebellion and disobedience! Ask God to give you a godly hatred of your own sin!

Read 2 Corinthians 10:3-6.

In **verse 5**, the expression “*casting down*” means to throw something down with *vehemence and violence*. It means “to destroy or annihilate” something. That is how you should view your sin! What is the sin you need to “cast down,” Christian? Is it a sin of the mind or eyes, such as lust, pornography, ungodly telly programmes, covetousness, or unrighteous anger? Is it a sin of the body, such as smoking, consuming alcohol, or gluttony? Is it a sin of the tongue, such as gossip, or lying (including those “little white lies” that you think “don’t do anyone any harm”)? Whatever it is, cast it down with violence! Throw it aside, as though it were a petri dish filled with bubonic plague!

Christians must consider the witnesses. We must consider the weights. Thirdly, we must...

III. Consider the wait.

(Read Hebrews 12:1 again.) At the end of this verse, Paul says, “*And let us run with patience the race that is set before us.*” Patience is extremely important for a runner in a race. He knows that the time he is devoting to exercise and physical discipline *is not* a waste. He must be patient as he exercises and prepares his body for the race; and he must have patience as he actually runs the race. He must not give in to his body’s longing for rest and comfort.

So it is in the Christian race. There are many trials that a Christian must go through in his Christian life; but God allows these trials in order to teach us to trust Him. Again and again, God’s Word commands us to be *patient*. The Psalmist David wrote, “*Wait on the LORD: be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart: wait, I say, on the LORD*” (Psalm 27:14). In Romans 5:3-5, Paul wrote, “*And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also:*

knowing that tribulation worketh patience; and patience, experience; and experience, hope; and hope maketh not ashamed.” In 2 Peter 1:5-6, Peter admonishes believers to “*add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; and to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience.*” In James 1:2-4, James gives this instruction: “*My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting* [or, “lacking”] *nothing.*”

Maybe you’re thinking, “Pastor, I have a hard time being patient. What does it take to learn patience?” First of all, to exercise patience, you must be fully persuaded that God really is in control of your life. You must be persuaded that the Lord really is working toward His own purpose in every trial in your life. If you are *not* persuaded of this, then your eyes are not on Christ; they are on things of the earth: and you will balk at your trials every time. You will whine, murmur, and complain; and you will have little to no thought of what glorious thing God might be trying to accomplish through your trial.

A Christian who is running his race with patience not only is convinced that God has a divine purpose in his trials, but he is *looking ahead* to the *end* of the race. He isn’t simply trusting Christ to get him over that hill that he is presently climbing; he is looking forward to seeing Christ Himself at the finish line. He is persuaded that whether or not the injustices that he is suffering are ever made right in this lifetime, they *will* be made right at the Judgment Seat of Christ. He is persuaded that whether or not he ever understands the purpose of his trials, God *is* using them for good: and he looks forward to the day when he will stand before His Saviour.

Consider these admonitions concerning patience.

Read James 5:7-8.

Read Philippians 3:10-14.

In James 3:14, the phrase “*high calling*” has the idea of “*upward calling.*” What Paul is saying is that as we run our race, we should have our eye on our “*upward calling*”--in other words, the Resurrection Day (the Rapture)! Whether we die before that day, and our bodies are lying in the grave, or whether we are still living, is for the Lord to decide; but as long as we are running our race on this earth, we *must* keep our eyes on the “*upward calling.*” Why? Because on that day, we will meet *Him*. *He* is the prize that we are running for. *He* is our “*exceeding great reward.*” When we meet our Saviour face-to-face, He will complete the “salvation package” by giving us new, immortal, glorified, sinless bodies. He will then gather us before His judgment seat; and He will give us rewards for our service to Him in this life. Just as the Olympic judge in Paul’s day sat on the *bema* seat, and handed out laurel crowns to the winners of the races, so Christ will sit on His heavenly *bema* seat, and will hand out the crown of righteousness, the crown of life, the incorruptible crown, the crown of glory, and the crown of rejoicing, to those who faithfully served Him. We will then cast those crowns at Jesus’ feet, and say, “*Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory, and honour, and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created.*”

Have you considered the wait, Christian? Is your eye on the one for whose glory you are running the race in the first place? Are your eyes continually on Jesus? Should your eyes be straying, get them back on Christ; and be patient unto the coming of the Lord! The trials of this life are only for a moment. There is a great day coming!

As we run the Christian race, we must consider the **witnesses**. We must consider the **weights**. We must consider the **wait**. Lastly, we must...

IV. Consider *the* Witness.

(Read Hebrews 12:2-3 again.) I wish I could dive deeper into **Hebrews 12:2** this morning; but I do not want to skim over the rich doctrinal truths in this verse. Next week, we will get out our magnifying glass, and look at **verses 2 and 3** in detail. For now, though, I'd like to point out the final admonition concerning the race we are in. We've already seen that we must consider **the witnesses** (the saints who have gone before us); but most importantly, we must consider ***the* Witness**. *The* witness of whom I am speaking is the Lord Jesus Christ.

Read Revelation 1:4-6.

Jesus Christ has always been, and always will be, the ***“faithful witness”*** to mankind. He is the one who reveals God's will and God's words to us; and it is He to whom we must always be looking as we run this race.

There are two reasons why we must ***“look unto Jesus.”*** First of all, **He is the very Object of our faith**. He is the Deliverer that God promised to Adam and Eve back in the Garden. He is that Seed who was sent to crush the devil's head. He is the One who fulfilled that Seed promise by taking on human flesh, paying for all our sins on the cross, and rising again for our justification. He is also the One who gave the revelations of Scripture to His prophets and Apostles, so that we could have the full body of truth concerning Himself. Everything we believe and hope for is embodied in the Person of Jesus Christ. He is the Object of our faith.

Secondly, we should be ***“looking unto Jesus”*** because **He is our Forerunner**. He is **the One who blazed the path of faith before us**. By His perfect, sinless life, He showed us what a life of faith in and obedience to God looks like. He ran the race perfectly, and passed every test. He is our Example; and it is He on whom our eyes should remain continually.

Conclusion: The unsaved world seeks after the things of this earth, and finds no satisfaction in them. In contrast, those of us who are saved have placed our faith in Christ; and in Him, we have everything that we need. However, are you *continuing* to keep your eyes on the Lord, Christian? Are you looking unto Jesus daily? If you will keep your eyes on Him, He will give you the faith and endurance that you need to run the race well. Perhaps your eyes have turned from the finish line, Christian. If so, I urge you to spend some time with the Lord today, and turn your eyes back on Jesus.

Perhaps some of you have never been saved. If so, you are not even *in* the race. “Running the Christian race” doesn't mean “trying to live a holy life, so that you can earn your way into Heaven.” You *can't* earn your way into Heaven. It's impossible. Your sin hopelessly separates you from God, and condemns you to hell. That is why Christ, in love, has earned your salvation for you. By His death and resurrection, He has purchased your salvation in full. You must, in simple faith, receive that free gift by asking Jesus

to forgive you of all your sins, and to save you. If you will receive that free gift, He will birth you into His Kingdom, and make you a child of God. Then, and only then, will you begin to run the Christian race; and the purpose of that race is to bring glory and honour to Jesus. Won't you come to Him today and be saved? Christ wants to use *your* life for His honour and glory!