

Looking Unto Jesus

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[0 : 00] I'm certainly glad to be here again this morning and spend this time together. It's always a delight to be able to gather to worship, just to be grateful that we live in a country where we have freedom to do this.

I remember years ago when I was still young and single, just before I went off to Bible college, I needed to earn some quick money because I was going to be a student.

And God opened up an opportunity for me to go work in a mining camp in Pickle Lake, Ontario. And I lived in this mining camp.

I was there for several weeks. And we were working long hours. It was called mine construction. And so we weren't limited in the hours we were working. We were kind of isolated, a little ways away from town.

And then one Sunday I had the opportunity to not work and drive into town. And there was a little chapel, a group of conservative Mennonite people that had a little chapel there.

[1 : 03] And they were doing outreach. I remember they had these little printed hymn books with hymns in Cree. And I joined them in fellowship. And I was just reminded again of how important it is to be with God's people and to enjoy that fellowship and the encouragement that comes when we worship together, when we sing together, when we pray together, when we hear the word of God expounded.

It just builds us up and encourages us in that walk with the Lord. The church that I spent my teenage years in, my dad was pastoring in a little town called Endeavor, Saskatchewan.

And I remember in the back of the platform on the wall, back in those days it was paneling. And on the wall we had looking unto Jesus, kind of in an arch like this, looking unto Jesus.

Those words come from Hebrews chapter 12. And this morning I'm going to be looking at that passage of scripture, Hebrews chapter 12. What we're doing with the book of Hebrews is at chapter 12, we're kind of jumping into a sermon.

Now some of the New Testament books are letters that the Apostle Paul or Peter or others wrote to churches or to groups of individuals to encourage them in the faith to maybe address some issue.

[2 : 27] Hebrews is more like a sermon. And so we're kind of jumping into the middle of a sermon. And the author of the book of Hebrews, we could say the preacher, the one that was delivering this sermon, is talking about how Jesus is the fulfillment of all of the Old Testament times leading up to everything is bringing, bringing, coming together and in the story of Jesus we find the fulfillment.

And so he's showing how the temple worship and the priesthood and all of these things of the past, how they are all pointing to Jesus and how Jesus comes and fulfills that.

And so in the beginning of chapter 12 there he's talking about let's look at Jesus, let's fix our attention on Jesus because he is God's plan for mankind to be reconciled to God for creation that is groaning and that has fallen into sin to be restored to fellowship with God.

So because of this great truth of who Jesus is and because Hebrews tells us in chapter 4 that he is a great high priest and he has opened the way for us to come with confidence to the throne of grace that we may obtain mercy to find grace to help us in our time of need.

And I always like that picture of, in the Old Testament, you know, there was that veil that separated the most holy place from the other parts of the temple. And only the high priest could enter in there with the blood of the sacrifice.

[4 : 08] Once a year he would go there and bring this sacrifice on behalf of the people. And then Jesus came and when he died on the cross that veil was torn. That means that now we have freedom to go into God's presence because of what Jesus has done.

And not only that, God has come out of that confined space and now he indwells us. And he says, when we believe in Jesus Christ, when we put our faith in him, we are a temple of the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit lives in us. So the Holy Spirit is now spread throughout the world in believers. And we have that confident, bold relationship with God through Jesus Christ.

And so that's kind of some of the story of the book of Hebrews. And so this preacher is so enthusiastic about who Jesus is and what he has accomplished and how God's plan has all come together.

And how we still have the hope of God continuing that plan and finishing that plan when Jesus Christ comes back again. So let's fix our eyes this morning on Jesus.

[5 : 17] Now to get us thinking along those lines a little bit, I want to ask you to just think for a little bit. In your own experience, is there a certain truth about Jesus or a certain description of Jesus that is easy for you to relate to?

Or that is especially comforting to you? Has that maybe changed in your life as you've grown as a believer, as you've walked with the Lord? Maybe that has changed.

The Bible gives us all kinds of descriptions or ways of thinking about Jesus. For example, in the Gospel of John, there are a number of statements that Jesus says, I am.

And of course, for a Jewish person reading the Gospel of John, when Jesus says, I am the way, the truth, and the life, they would have automatically associated him with God saying in the Old Testament to Moses, I am who I am.

So Jesus is making that claim to divinity. So he says, I am the way, the truth, and the life. Maybe sometimes that truth has just gripped you, and you've said, wow, this is amazing that in this world of confusion, I can know the truth, and the truth can set me free.

[6 : 35] Or Jesus said, I am the bread of life. Maybe you've walked around with a hunger inside or a thirst, and Jesus said, I am the living water. And so the bread of life and the living water have just met that need and satisfied that need.

Maybe there have been other pictures or images. Maybe you're very familiar with the 23rd Psalm, the Lord is my shepherd. And then Jesus comes in John chapter 10 and says, I am the good shepherd.

I lay down my life for the sheep. So many truths about Jesus. Jesus, Emmanuel, God with us. Jesus, the Prince of Peace.

Jesus, the Wonderful Counselor. Jesus, the Prophet, the Priest, the King. There are so many pictures of Jesus. Jesus, the Lion and the Lamb.

Maybe you can especially relate to some of those. You say, yes, there was a certain time in my life where that truth just became real and meaningful to me and helped me to understand who Jesus is.

[7 : 37] So let's read the first few verses of Hebrews chapter 12. And then we'll talk a little bit about this idea of walking with Jesus.

The whole thrust of the message in the book of Hebrews is about persevering or about endurance. And so in chapter 12, we find the preacher is starting to kind of wrap up his sermon.

He's trying to bring, he's bringing some of these loose ends together. And he's saying, this is how we walk with God. This is how we persevere. This is how we endure. Because life is not always easy.

The Christian life is not always easy. Sometimes it's great. Sometimes it's easy. Sometimes we live on the mountain. Sometimes we're in the valley. So let's read Hebrews chapter 12, verse 1.

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.

[8 : 43] Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men so that you will not grow weary and lose heart. In your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood.

And you have forgotten the word of encouragement that addresses you as sons. My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son.

Endure hardship as discipline. God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father? And if you are not disciplined and everyone undergoes discipline, then you are illegitimate children and not true sons.

Moreover, we all had human fathers who disciplined us, and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the father of our spirits and live? Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best, but God disciplines us for our good.

[10 : 07] God is good. God is always loving. God is always just. God is always righteous. God is always fair. God is always pulling for us. Oh, God is rooting for us.

He does it for our good, that we may share in his holiness. To belong to the family of God.

To be one with God. To be reconciled to God. That we may share in his holiness. No discipline seems pleasant at the time. Well, we can probably all relate to that, can't we?

No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it. Therefore, strengthen your feeble arms and weak knees.

Make level paths for your feet so that what is lame may not be disabled, but rather healed. So there we read a little bit about God's purpose for us.

[11 : 09] He starts off saying, therefore, and when we read therefore in the Bible, then we always look to see what it is there for, right? You've heard that before, haven't you? Many times.

If you've been to church, you've heard that over and over and over again, right? So, chapter 11 is what we refer to as the heroes of the faith.

There's a whole list of people that walked with God, that depended on God, that trusted God. So we read about Abraham, we read about Moses, we read about these heroes of the faith and how they clung to the promise of God, even though sometimes in this lifetime here on earth, they didn't see the promise fulfilled, but they held on to the promise of God.

They said, what God has spoken is true, and I will put my trust in it. I will believe that God has spoken, that he means what he says, and that he will fulfill his promises.

And some of them saw great miracles in their life, some of them saw great deliverances in their life, some of them saw great evidences of God's power in their life. And it said, And others went through all kinds of hardship.

[12 : 22] They faced jeers, they faced persecution, they faced oppression, they were stoned, they were put to death by the sword, they were destitute and persecuted, mistreated, the world was not worthy of them.

They wandered about in deserts and mountains and caves and holes in the ground, and yet they clung to their faith in God. And it says, And they were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised.

God planned something better for us, so that only together with us would they be made perfect. In other words, while we're here on earth, God is doing a work in us, but there's going to be a fullness, a fulfillment of that work at some time even in the future.

And that all comes together in Christ. And so he starts chapter 12 by saying, Since we have all of these examples, all these witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles.

Now I'm not one to watch a lot of sports, but you can't help but notice during the Olympics the intensity of the competition.

[13 : 34] Some of these competitors, they win a medal by hundreds of a second. And there is so much effort put into training, and there is so much effort put into the right kind of equipment.

If you're going to be a runner, if you're going to be a cyclist, if you're going to be a swimmer, you have just the best of the equipment and gear that is available. And people spend a lot of time and effort trying to design something that will give them just that little bit of advantage so that they can win their competition.

And so the scripture here is telling us, throw off the things that hinder. Throw off the sin that entangles us. Put every effort into being the best competitor that you can.

I noticed in these couple of verses, there are, especially, I'm using the New International Version of the Bible, and there it says, let us throw off.

Let us do this. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus. Let us. When we were studying Spanish, they told us that this type of construction in Spanish was referred to as a command of courtesy.

[14 : 47] So it carried the weight of a command, but it wasn't done in a harsh way. It was done in a way of saying, let's join together and put our effort into doing this.

Let's see what we can accomplish together. And so that's what I'm seeing here in scripture. Let us throw off anything that entangles and the sin that so easily, anything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles us.

Now we know that sin is something that the devil would like to use to distract us, to keep us from serving God well. And of course, temptation at the start always looks great, doesn't it?

Temptation always looks attractive. Otherwise, it wouldn't be temptation. But here's what somebody has said, Neil Strait has said about sin. Sin does not serve well as a gardener of the soul.

It landscapes the contour of the soul until all that is beautiful has been made ugly. Until all that is high is made low. Until all that is promising is wasted.

[15 : 57] Then life is like the desert, parched and barren. It is drained of purpose. It is bleached of happiness. Sin then is not wise, but wasteful.

It is not a gate, but only a grave. I think that's very insightful about sin. And so it's important to throw that off and get rid of it so that we can run in freedom.

Another person has written this. Because of sin, mankind has taken the deity out of religion, the supernatural out of Christianity, the authority from the Bible, God out of education, morality and virtue out of literature, beauty and truth out of art, ethics out of business, fidelity out of marriage.

Pretty true words. So we need to throw that off. The guilt, the bondage, the shame, the hiding, the deception. Jesus has taken all of that sin upon himself.

Our past sin, our present sin, our future sin, he's already paid for it. It says in Isaiah chapter 53, that all we like sheep have gone astray.

[17 : 17] We have turned everyone to his own way and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. And then he also says in Isaiah chapter 1, verse 18, come now and let us reason together, says the Lord, though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be white as snow.

Though they are red like crimson, they shall be as wool. If you are willing and obedient, you will eat the best from the land. So sin is there to destroy and distract us and keep us from running that race with Christ.

But Jesus Christ has already paid the price. So that is one of the let us. The next let us is in the end of Hebrews chapter 12, verse 1, which says, let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.

Let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. So in Hebrews, the author, the preacher, has already been making a point.

And if we go through, just, let's just kind of review a couple of verses. He's making the point about persevering. He's making the point about let us run with endurance.

[18 : 34] So if we start in chapter 2, and we'll just kind of glance at a few verses to give us this idea. Chapter 2, verse 1.

We must pay more careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away. Now, how often is a failure in the Christian life catastrophic?

How often does it come as a big crisis? Usually, it shows up as a crisis after there has been a drifting away. There have been thought patterns.

There have been little actions. There have been little habits that have been forming that have been destructive, that have been undermining the faith. And then comes the big failure. So the writer is saying, be careful that we, to what we, and listen to what we've heard.

Pay attention to what we've heard, so that we do not drift away. Then in chapter 4, he's talking about the fact that God wants his people to come to rest.

[19 : 40] Jesus said, you know, all you that are weary and heavy laden, come to me, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon me, and take up my yoke upon you, and learn of me, for I am meek and lowly of heart, and you will find rest for your souls.

So in Hebrews chapter 4, he's talking about that rest. Therefore, since the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us be careful that none of you be found to fall short of it.

And then later on in that same chapter, verse 11, let us therefore make every effort to enter that rest so that none will fall by following their example of disobedience.

So again, he's talking about enduring, he's talking about pursuing something that is good. Chapter 6, the beginning of chapter 6, talks about the fact that even though we should, he's telling the people, even though you should already be the point of being able to be a teacher and an instructor and a leader of others, you still need to be taught the most elementary truths of the gospel message.

And so he says you need to show diligence. Show diligence to the very end in order to make your hope sure. We don't want you to become lazy, but we want you to imitate those who through faith and patience inherit what has been promised.

[21 : 08] In chapter 10, verse 23 to 25, let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds.

Let us not give up meeting together as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another and all the more as you see that day approaching. So he's talking about this perseverance.

He's talking about enduring. He's talking about how we need to run this race let us run this race with perseverance.

And then there's another let us. If we look at chapter, number, verse 2, let us fix our eyes on Jesus.

Or as I mentioned, the words that I saw and used to see in our little chapel in Endeavor, looking unto Jesus is the King James version of it. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus.

[22 : 13] Now, Hebrews chapter 12, verse 2 in the Amplified Bible reads like this. Looking away from all that will distract us to Jesus, who is the leader and the source of our faith, giving the first incentive for our belief and is also its finisher, bringing it to maturity and perfection.

He, for the joy of obtaining the prize that was set before Him, endured the cross, despising and ignoring the shame and is now seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

And then in 1 Peter chapter 2 it talks a little bit more about Jesus. 1 Peter chapter 2 verse 21 says, To this you were called because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example that you should follow in His steps.

He committed no sin and no deceit was found in His mouth. When they hurled their insults at Him, He did not retaliate. When He suffered, He made no threats.

Instead, He entrusted Himself to Him who judges justly. He Himself bore our sins in His body on the tree so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness.

[23 : 37] By His wounds you have been healed. For you were like sheep going astray, but now you have returned to the shepherd and overseer of your souls.

Let us fix our eyes on Jesus. Now, if you drive by a farmer's field nowadays, what do you see? You see really nice straight lines because the machine is guided by GPS.

I remember back in the days when I first worked for a farmer and I was driving this little Fordson Major tractor that, wow, it had all of about 50 horsepower and the farmer was pretty insistent that I try to make the rows as straight as I could so I wouldn't miss cultivating parts of the field or it wouldn't overlap too much.

So what did I do? When I started out at the end of the field, I would pick a mark at the far end and I would aim the tractor for that because if I tried to just follow my track, pretty soon I was doing this but if I had a mark at the far end and I kept following it, then I could stay a little bit straighter.

Nothing compared to GPS now but it was better if I did that and that's the way it is with our walk with God. If we fix our eyes on Jesus, we can walk and we can walk toward him and the distractions won't have such a big effect on us.

[25 : 07] So I just want to mention a couple of things about looking unto Jesus. A farther look. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross.

He didn't just look at the cross although it was significant, it was important. He agonized over it in the Garden of Gethsemane but he looked beyond it and he said the reward of what is going to be accomplished if I am faithful to the Father's plan outweighs the suffering and the pain of what I'm going to endure.

So Jesus had a farther look even though he begged God if it be possible may this cup be taken from me yet he endured because of what lay before him.

What lay beyond that? The power of sin is broken. A fallen groaning creation will be recreated. The lost will be found, the broken will be healed. Paradise will be regained.

Who for the joy set before him endured. He took a farther look and so Hebrews encourages us looking unto Jesus. Take a farther look.

[26 : 19] Look beyond the immediate, look beyond the immediate trials, the immediate temptations. Look to Jesus beyond that. A higher look. He endured the cross scoring his shame and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

A higher look. So often we look at the circumstance around us. We look at the immediate. We need to look up to Jesus. Jesus. All of this earth is passing away.

Weeping may endure for a night but joy comes in the morning. What was true for Jesus is also true for us. 2 Corinthians chapter 4 reminds us of that.

It says at the end of the chapter, therefore we do not lose heart though outwardly we are wasting weight yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day for our light and momentary trouble.

Wait a minute. Light and momentary troubles? Does it feel that way some days? Sometimes it feels like the burdens are pretty heavy. But compared to the weight of eternity, compared to the weight of glory, it is small.

[27 : 37] It says for our light and who is writing this? Light and momentary troubles. The apostle Paul right? And in 2 Corinthians he talks about I've been shipwrecked.

I've been beaten. I've been stoned. I've been persecuted. I've been chased from pillar to post because of my faith in Jesus Christ. He says these are light and momentary troubles in comparison to what God has planned for us.

For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen but what is unseen for what is seen is temporary what is unseen is eternal.

And so we have a higher look. Jesus said when you see all these things happening what is he? Lift up your head because your redemption draws near. And then a deeper look.

Verse 3 starts consider him who endured such opposition so that you will not grow weary and lose heart. Consider. think about ponder spend time reflecting.

[28 : 45] Now there is a form of worldly meditation that says just empty your mind and be open to whatever thoughts may come. Well it's no wonder there's confusion in the devil's playground.

But there is a godly form of meditation that means literally chew the cud on God's word. Whatever is true noble pure right lovely admirable excellent praiseworthy think on these things and the God of peace will be with you.

Consider a farther look beyond the immediate a higher look to all that God has prepared for us the eternal weight of glory a deeper look spend time pondering who Jesus is and what he has done.

And then it says in Hebrews chapter 12 verse 12 therefore strengthen your feeble arms and your weak knees make level paths of your feet so that what is lamed may not be disabled but rather healed.

That is God's plan for us. Not fearful not anxious but boldly confident not faltering but thriving. And what's at stake? our eternal well-being is at stake.

[30 : 08] God's honor is at stake. People look at us and they say they form their opinion of God by what they see in us. That's a pretty heavy responsibility.

If we had to try and do that on our own it'd be hopeless. But the Holy Spirit is in us to empower us to show the image of Christ. Jesus said let your light shine such a way before men that men will see your good deeds and glorify your Father who is in heaven.

And we will have an influence on others. If we faithfully walk with God fixing your eyes on Jesus our life will be an example to others. It will be an encouragement to others.

And praise God that's what you as a congregation are to me. When I spend time here interacting with you you're an encouragement to me and I bless you for that. And I praise God for that.

And I trust that I will be the same for you as I serve him. May God bless you as you continue to serve him faithfully. And I'd like to just invite us to close with a word of prayer.

[31 : 22] Father in heaven it is just such a great privilege to belong to you. To know that because of what Jesus Christ has done I can come to you with confidence and with boldness and obtain the grace and the mercy that I need to help me in time of trouble.

I thank you Lord God that we have the freedom to meet together in this land that we have the freedom to have your word in our hands that we can read we can study we can learn we can encourage one another we can teach one another the truths that we have learned from you and I thank you Lord that you are the one that gives us a healthy perspective on life.

there are many things in life that are important that we pay attention to we pay attention to our work and to our families and to our daily responsibilities but we recognize Lord that these are all things that pass away with time and the only thing that we'll endure for all eternity is our relationship with you and our relationship with others that have come to know you and are part of your family and so I pray Lord that you would help us as we look to Jesus to simplify the things of our life in such a way that we are not distracted from doing what is most important loving you with all of our heart with all of our soul with all of our mind with all of our strength and loving our neighbor as ourself we know we can't do it on our own and so we depend on your grace we depend on you living your life through us and we thank you Lord that you've promised to not just begin a work in us but to bring it to completion until the day of Jesus Christ we praise you in his wonderful holy name amen