

Looking to Jesus

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Date: 17 September 2017

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[0 : 00] Find on page 1008 of Church Bibles. 1008, the section that begins, By faith the people crossed the Red Sea as on dry land, but the Egyptians, when they attempted to do the same, were drowned.

And the section that ends, well, from chapter 12, verse 1, Therefore, since we're surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and sin which clings so closely.

It has run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus. And I know it doesn't mean me to say this, but it's been a few weeks since we were last, really, we might say, absorbed in the great heroes of the faith that the anonymous author to the Hebrews here begins telling us off at the start of chapter 11.

These great heroes who lived by faith, who trusted in the promises of God, who trusted in God, who lived by faith, who lived in his promises, even though they didn't see the fulfillment of the promises that God had given them in their lifetime.

We have spent quite a bit of time looking at these individuals, these individuals whom the author of this letter has listed to encourage his readers, to encourage us, to encourage you not to give up, not to lose heart, but to continue to trust in the Lord, the Lord God who promises eternal life, even to all who are in Christ.

[1 : 44] And, you know, chapter 11, Hebrews 11, is one of these chapters that really we should return to again and again to bring us that encouragement, particularly when we're sort of tempted to look to self rather than looking to God.

You know, when we're tempted to look to circumstances rather than looking to a sovereign God who does all things well. So, you know, it's for you and I to take time to focus on Noah's faith, to focus on Moses' faith, to focus on Abraham's faith, that faith that was gifted to them by God.

Faith exercised in the assurance of things, hope for the conviction of things not seen. Why? Because these were heroes of faith, heroes of the faith, heroes who trusted God, who knows all things, who sees all things, whose promises are sure and confirmed in the Lord Jesus.

But, you know, as we said, we spent some time, as the author said, the Hebrews here spends quite a bit of time in these individuals. But then when we get to verse 29, the pace quickens.

There's not the same, you know, pausing to reflect on the likes of Abel and Noah and Abraham and Moses. The author wants to get to the point. He wants to get to the point from where he started.

[3 : 13] And of course the end point is, here is the Lord Jesus. That's why we read on into chapter 12. And, you know, you can just imagine the writers here. This writer, he's been writing down all that he's been writing of these heroes.

Then he realizes, I have to move on. I've got to get to the point. He realizes he doesn't have time to linger more fully on the other heroes of the faith that are recorded in Scripture, recorded in our Old Testament.

I know the feeling. I know what it's like. I know the feeling, what it's like to get a move on, as I say. For the last two years, I've been doing this Masters. Two years.

Two years of research. Two years of writing. Two years of draft. Two years of second draft. Two years of footnote checking. The best part of two years, focusing on a particular subject.

And I've just wanted to get to the end of the last two weeks. I've almost made it to the end. I needed to get to the end point. I needed to get to the conclusion.

[4 : 19] To summarize the 40,000 words into literally a few sentences, you might say. I need to get to the point. I need to see what these two years have been worth, leading up to my conclusion.

Well, for this anonymous writer here, this writer to the letter of the Hebrews, it's been like that. It's equally says that in verse 32. Time would fail me to tell off.

He's got to get to the finishing line. So he's just going to list a few names, even just not mentioning other names, just mentioned by inference.

He's just got to get to the finishing line. He's got to get to the conclusion. He's going to sum up all this, all what these heroes have been about. Because they've all been about, as he triumphantly says at the start of chapter 12 there.

It's all about Jesus. So we're going to travel with the author here. We're going to travel with him to the finishing line. And we're going to see the triumph of faith that looks to Jesus.

[5 : 23] And not like the author, we don't have the time to focus on all the individuals named here, and also the ones that are unnamed as we go through from verse 29. But isn't that the point?

There's this quickening pace to Jesus. That's what these heroes are leading up to. But remember, this is scripture. And they are here in God's word.

So yes, we're going to glimpse them. It's almost like just watching a car that goes very, very fast. We're going to glimpse them in this fast pace of the telling. But we still glimpse them. We still catch sight of them.

And the headings that you've got in your handout, pray, will help us to see, to glimpse what the author here is giving by divine inspiration. So the first thing we see from verse 29 to 31, faith overcoming difficulties.

Just imagine you're living at the time when this letter was written. You're living in a mighty Roman Empire. It's an empire that's been persecuting Christians.

[6 : 31] And at the same time, you've got, well, imagine this time, you who were once of the Jewish religion. You've got Jewish opponents who hate you.

Who hate you because of your faith in the Lord Jesus. For you're proclaiming that Jesus is the Christ, Jesus is the Messiah. So you're under attack from all sides. What are you going to do?

What are you going to turn to for your hope, for your encouragement? Who do you turn to? You turn to the God who's mightier than the Roman Empire.

You turn to the God who's mightier than your Jewish opponents. You turn in faith to the God who led his people through the Red Sea.

And you gain your inspiration even from Moses and the people who crossed that sea. Remember when God parted the waters so that they could pass through to the same God who enclosed these same waters that caused the pursuing Egyptian army to be drowned.

- [7 : 40] And if that display of faith that we read there from verse 29, if that display of faith isn't sufficient for your weak faith then consider the armies of Israel as they're about to enter the promised land.
- And mighty Jericho, the city of Jericho standing in your way or in their way. Strong walled fortress. The city strategically placed. How can these walls be broken down?
- How are the people going to triumph under Joshua's leadership? They're going to do what God's word tells them to do. They're going to march around that city for seven days.
- And on the seventh day they're going to blow their trumpets. They're going to blast with their trumpets and the walls will fall down as they did. The apparent hurdle, the difficulty of the seemingly impregnable Jericho as nothing compared to the power of Almighty God.
- And then as we're told the faith of Rahab. Rahab of Jericho. Rahab who wouldn't side with her people but instead sided with the Lord and his people. And by faith she trusted in Almighty God to save her.
- [8 : 50] But you know you don't need to imagine. You don't need imagination to ponder these examples of faith in the face of difficulty. Because if you're a Christian you're facing them every day.
- the seemingly impregnable mindset of today's movers and shakers who despise the Lord Jesus.
- Who despise his church. Who despise his people. You've got that facing you. You've got the ever increasing pace of change that can leave the believer reeling unless his faith unless her faith is sure in the sovereign God of heaven and earth.
- the seemingly mighty power of the media that you know seeks to destroy even politicians who take a biblical stance on everything from the sanctity of life to the sanctity of marriage.
- Who do you turn to for your encouragement? Who do you turn to in your remaining and your continuing in your faith? You turn to Almighty God.
- [9 : 56] You continue to trust in him. And you don't fall back into some kind of hopelessness. No. Faith. Faith in him. Faith in the Lord Jesus overcomes difficulties.
- And then secondly really moving on from that from verse 32 right down to certainly verse 40 we see faith in hard times. Because really from verse 32 the pace really quickens.
- I mean you see that at the start of verse 32 six names just names just names given. You've heard I'm sure most of these names but six names and then just the prophets and then the various triumphs of faith that God accomplished through these individuals.
- I mean these six names that you see at the start of the verse 32 they cover hundreds of years. So what's been said here is just in the listing of these names and then what follows.
- Well a lot. A lot. I mean look at the first four names mentioned there. Gideon, Barak, Samson and Jephthah. These were men who lived in the time of the judges.
- [11 : 07] It was a time when Israel was in a desperately low state spiritually and those who remained true in faith and the one true God they were under constant attack.
- Constant attack from those who despised God. They were under constant attack from pagan enemies. Okay these individuals like Gideon there, like Barak, Samson, Jephthah, they had faults.
- They had character failings. Gideon remember at one point his fear. Barak who was very hesitant, Samson so hot headed, Jephthah if you read of him in scripture so rash.
- These were men whom God used to overcome God's enemies. Men who did what they did in the strength of God, the Lord, men who God used to overcome vast armies, who overcame by faith.

Faith demanded obedience, even, well, to the cost of their very lives and certainly in Samson's case. Very much individuals who were in a minority, a minority of faithful people, but God displaying his powers through them.

[12 : 21] Yes, they were often very faltering and weak individuals, you know, God displays his power through faltering and weak individuals, even through me, even through you.

Yes, we falter so many times in our faith, but you and I need to be reminded and constantly reminded that the one who is in us, who is in you, is greater than he who is in the world.

Well, let's look at, let's focus on a wee bit more here. David and Samson, just mentioned here, but then when you look through how the author describes their faith, David and Samuel, as we said, they cover great swathes of scripture.

And then we see here prophets, just mentioned, just prophets. But look at what follows from verse 33. We see their triumphs of faith, faith that moved mountains, conquered kingdoms, as well.

David the shepherd boy, of course, he became king, king of Israel. In faith he conquered powerful enemies of God. And then you've got here enforcing justice, Samuel the prophet, Samuel the judge.

[13 : 38] And then this obtained promises, of course, David himself obtained the promise of one to come whose reign would be eternal. Stop the mouth of lions.

You see there at end of verse 33. It refers, of course, to Daniel. Daniel and the lions then. Or else here, quenching the power of fire. Think of Daniel's friends Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who trusted God even in the firmness.

Then we're told here of escape the edge of the sword. Well, we can look to Elijah. Remember, he mocked Jezebel and her prophets, Jezebel who would put him to death for mocking her gods.

He escaped the edge of her sword as well. And so on and so on. Women received back their death. Think of Elijah the prophet when he raised the son of a widow.

Or Elisha the prophet when he raised the son of a foreign woman. There's this list, and then the list of sufferings endured by God's people. But God's giving them strength to endure what they endure for the glory of God.

[14 : 43] Great men and great women of God for whom the world wasn't worthy. But by faith, by faith, show that they were separate from the world.

A world that wasn't even worthy of their presence. Why? Because of their living testimony to the grace of God in their lives. And yet, and yet, yet these named heroes of the faith, these unnamed heroes of the faith, they had a lesser privilege than you and I have today.

Why? Well, what we're told in verse 39 and 40, they didn't receive what was promised since God had provided something better for us. Think of these words here for a moment.

Just try and take this in. Right back to Genesis, right back to the beginning of the Bible. Think of heroes, as it goes through Genesis, right through the Old Testament, the hearers of the faith, waiting.

They had the promise, the promise of a saviour to come. Go right back, as we said, to Genesis, even the word that God gave in Genesis 3, verse 15, of one to come who crushed the head of the serpent.

[15 : 59] Then you've got, as we said, the promise given to David of an eternal king who will reign in the throne of Israel forever. It's pointing to the Lord Jesus, as Genesis 3, verse 15, pointing to Jesus.

And the promise given to Daniel, promise given of one like the Son of Man to come, pointing to Jesus. The promise given to Isaiah of a suffering servant who'd come who will bear the sins of his people, pointing to Jesus.

And these promises held through generation after generation, but the heroes of the faith in the Old Testament, they didn't see the fulfillment of these promises.

they could only be perfected in their faith by the fulfillment of God's promises, God's promise in Jesus.

You think of the privilege that you and I have, because you know the fulfillment of these Old Testament promises. You know the fulfillment is found in the Lord Jesus.

[17 : 02] And that truth, that's a truth that's for your encouragement, for you to continue in faith in the Lord Jesus. Why is it an encouragement? Well you think of Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, Samuel, Elijah, these were men of great faith.

And they triumphed in faith. Even though they didn't receive the knowledge of the fulfillment of God's promises in the Lord Jesus, they persevered, they persevered in faith.

Even though they were limited in their full understanding of the promises God gave to them. But they triumphed. They triumphed, yes, even with their limitations.

And as for first century AD readers who read these words, so for 21st century Christians who believe in the Lord Jesus, you know, our faith, your faith should be the stronger.

Your faith should be the more sure, the more exercised, the more trusting in the one who's overcome the power of kingdoms, even the very kingdom of Satan himself.

[18 : 11] And your faith should be the more looking to Jesus because you know that he's conquered the power of Satan, you know that he's conquered the power of Satan, you know that he's conquered the power of death itself, he's promised everlasting life to all who believe in him.

God has provided something better for us, he's provided the Lord Jesus, he's provided that fuller knowledge of God in the face of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And you know you can't just say, you can't say oh but these heroes of the faith in the Old Testament, they had something we don't have, you can't say that, you can't say oh but they had some kind of special faith, extra faith to cope with their hardships and the opposition of others, not at all.

We're told elsewhere in scripture, we're told of Elijah and if we're told of Elijah, we cover every one of God's people we read of in scripture. They were men like us.

They were men and women like us. You and I, we have something better provided by the God of all grace. You just think of that for a moment. You think of your privilege.

[19 : 22] If you come to faith in the Lord Jesus, you think, remember your privilege because you know Jesus. You know him whom Isaiah pointed forward to, you know Jesus who suffered for you, who died for you.

You know that he's the once for all sacrifice. You know that he's the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. You know that he's made it possible for you to come to God by faith in him.

You know it because of the cross of the Lord Jesus. You know that he is the bridge between man and God. You know that God has shone his light into your heart to enable you to know his glory, to know him in the face of the Lord Jesus.

And you're seeing Jesus. You're seeing Jesus whom these heroes of the faith could only anticipate in faith. The privileges are yours.

Yours in Christ. surely then that should the more make you strong in faith as you follow your saviour, as you rest in his love, as you trust in the one who's done all things for you.

[20 : 32] And you know when you think of these heroes of the faith, they suffered much and they achieved so much by faith. And yet, and yet they had so little of what you and I have that again that should encourage you to endure all things for the sake of the saviour who endured all things for your sake.

So why am I, why are you still so prone to doubt? Why are we so prone still to doubt our saviour's love? Why are we still so prone at times to doubt our saviour's promises?

Why do you and I, why do I, why do you live so often so weak in faith? Why don't we've been blessed with something far better than our spiritual forefathers had?

John Calvin put it so well, he said this, a tiny spark of light led them, led these heroes of the faith to heaven. Now that the sun of righteousness, S-U-N, the sun of righteousness shines in us, what excuses shall we offer if we still hold on to earth?

Where's my faith? Where's your faith? Where's our faith in the sun of righteousness, in the sun of God, the Lord Jesus? Is it because so often we take our eyes away from him and unto ourselves and unto the world?

[22 : 01] What's the remedy of our weak faith? Well, the answer's before us, the answer's there at the start of chapter 12, it's that faith that looks to Jesus. You know, at the start of this year, very first prayer meeting that, you know, tended to have in the month, we looked actually at these first two verses of Hebrews 12.

We looked at them in the context of the year that lay before us. We're now two-thirds, more than two-thirds of our way through, and we return to these words of great encouragement.

in fact, don't ever be a verse to returning to a passage of scripture that so blessed us and encouraged us. We're going to obviously look at the same verses, maybe with different words, but the same emphasis here to look to Jesus.

And so we've got here, look at the first word there, therefore, that great linking word. It connects what's been said before with what's about to come. So, therefore, because we have these great heroes of faith surrounding us, because they're over us like a cloud, we're encouraged by their faith, we're encouraged by their faith, exercised in all the limitations, we're encouraged to be the more holy, to be less worldly minded, as we do what?

As we look to Jesus. And the analogy is there. It's a racetrack. It's like a crowd encouraging you when you run a race.

[23 : 38] They're like supporters there to encourage you. I've only ever been to one athletics event. It was way back in 1986. It was the Commonwealth Games, when the Commonwealth Games were held at Medibank Stadium.

And I was in the crowd that watched, well, she was then Liz Lynch when she won the 10,000 metres for Scotland. The whole crowd was part of it. The whole crowd were cheering her on.

I suspect that the difference that the home crowd made certainly to her, quite a big partner motivation. enough determination to succeed. Well, the race that God has set out for us, an hour and your enduring to the end, you might say that race has spectators, the hearers of the faith.

As it were, they're witnessing our life of faith, our struggles. angels. And so, be encouraged by them. Look at how they endured without the privilege that you and I have in knowing Christ.

And what do you see in these witnesses? You see selfless denial. See how verse 1 puts it? Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also, let us also, as well as these heroes, let us also do that which enables them to run their race.

[25 : 04] So, let us also do what? Well, certainly reject those sins that so easily cling to our hearts. Reject anything that's going to slow you down in service for your saviour. To persevere through the race.

Persevere in faith when you and I do stumble and we're attacked and we feel like giving up. Let us also. But then there's something better in our motivation, in your endurance.

Let's look to the Lord Jesus, the founder of our faith, the perfecter of our faith. Jesus, the founder or maybe even better the pioneer of our faith.

In other words, Jesus who's led us people, Old Testament saints, New Testament saints. Jesus who's gone before us all to make it possible for you and I to believe and to have faith and to endure that race that you and I are given to run in your serving the Lord Jesus and your witness as a Christian.

And Jesus the perfecter of our faith. Jesus the one who walked in full obedience to his Father's will in perfect faith, even, even unto death.

[26 : 17] faith. By that death, Jesus endured to the end and enables you to trust in faith, to walk in faith, to be presented faultless before God when you reach the goal of your race, you reach the glory of heaven and be with Christ eternally.

So, you know, just picture it like this, you've got these spectators around you, encouraging you, encouraging you in your race of faith, but you've got Jesus before you as you're heading to that finishing line and you see him and you fix your eyes on him and no one else.

What more do you and I need for our life? You know, we complain so many times about so many things and even at times even questioning God's providence for us.

And yet you and I who know the Lord Jesus have been given the greatest of privileges and even the very blessing of these cloud of witnesses surrounding us and Jesus before us. So fix, command, fix your eyes on Jesus, the author of your faith, the Jesus who triumphed in faith, Jesus who trusted in his heavenly father for all things, even when he was on the cross, when he cried out, father, into your hands, I commit my spirit.

Jesus who endured all things for the sake of his own people, Jesus who suffered for your sake and my sake so that we might have life everlasting. Fix your eyes on him, fix your eyes on Jesus, who's begun that good work in you and will carry that work to full perfection when you enter into the glory of heaven.

[28 : 07] And there you'll know that perfection in him. Fix your eyes on Jesus, your savior, your lord, because Jesus himself ran his race with endurance.

He triumphed. As we're told in verse 2, he's now seated at the right hand of the father. Fix your eyes on Jesus, but do it, do I, do you?

Well, be encouraged, be encouraged with these saints of old, be encouraged with the motivation of a savior who loved you enough to die for you. I mean, what better incentive do you have to live for the Lord Jesus, to deny yourself and to take up your cross and to follow Jesus and to do it with that knowledge in your heart that you are his and he is yours eternally.

You know, just count your blessings. Just think of the many privileges that you have by the grace of God. You think of your earthly privileges, your daily bread, your homes, the gift of home, the gift of family, the provision in life.

How often do we truly, truly count as of greatest value the privilege that is yours in knowing Jesus who has made it possible for you to believe and who is there with you and for you in the midst of hardships and opposition and difficulties.

[29 : 40] Look, fix your eyes on Jesus. Look to him who endured what you and I who know what we'll never endure. Just remember, Jesus became that curse of God.

He who knew no sin became sin for us. That you and I will never face the curse of God. He's gone ahead of you so that you and I might be where he is now, even as he waits for you, even as he's waiting to welcome you into his heavenly home.

What if there's any here even this morning who don't know the privilege of being found in the Lord Jesus and knowing him as Lord and Saviour? Where is your hope?

What do you trust for your life? Because whenever, whatever you trust, whatever you place your trust in, if it's not the Lord Jesus, it's just a cruel delusion.

It's a delusion that will end or result in you forfeiting the grace that could be yours. The delusions of the world that promise so much that give nothing of eternal value.

[30 : 52] In whom do you trust? We'll pray that you will be trusting, looking to the Lord Jesus. that you'll cast aside everything and everything that entangles you in that race that God has given you to run.

And that you'll run as you look to Jesus, as you see him, and as you give your life to him, as you live that life of faith to the glory of God, to the glory of his name forever.

Amen. Let us pray. Our loving, eternal, heavenly Father, you who encourage us through your word, by your word, encourage each and every one of your people with the testimonies of the hearers of the faith, even in their limited knowledge of the fullness of the promise that you gave to them.

We thank you for that encouragement. And we thank you that you give us eyes of faith to see the Lord Jesus to fix our eyes on him, who endured all things for us, so that we might know eternal life in him.

Oh Lord, help us, we pray, even in the weakness of our faith. May we know that even if we have faith, even as small as a grain of mustard seed, that by the Lord Jesus helping us, we can move mountains.

[32 : 19] So help us each one. Strengthen our faith, we pray, to see you in all your glory and all your power and all your might. And we ask all these things in and through the name of Jesus.

Amen. Well, let's close in Psalm 34.