

LET US FIX OUR EYES ON JESUS

Hebrews 12:1 - 13:25

Key verse 12:2

„fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.“

Thank God that we could study the letter to the Hebrews in 7 lectures at this GLEF 2022. The Letter to the Hebrews was written between 60 and 70 AD for Jewish Christians. But it is also very relevant to us. Because of hardships and sufferings many Jewish Christians had doubts and have been tempted to deny God's grace and fall away from faith. Likewise, in our time, many young Christians are seduced by the spirit of the time and its false teachings such as hedonism, postmodernism, egoism and supposed freedom. They are full of doubts and are tempted to reject the one and only truth of eternal life and shrink back in faith, losing God's unique gift to them. The author, however, encourages the Christians not to shrink back, but to hold on to their faith in Jesus, by proclaiming the supremacy of the Gospel of Jesus over everything. In other words, the Gospel of Christ Jesus, in the past, now and in the future, is the only way of salvation and the only way to God. Thank God for Jesus the true high priest and the author and perfecter of our salvation! Now, we can again draw near to God with sincere heart and full assurance of faith!

Now, what? Now, it is important to run the race of faith with perseverance until next GLEF and ultimately, until we receive the crown of victory. Today, let us personally hear and accept the author's serious advice to fix our eyes on Jesus, run the race of faith with perseverance and meet Jesus again "outside the camp".

I. Let us run with perseverance (12:1-29)

Let us look at 12:1: "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,..." Here, the author of Hebrews compared the life of faith to a marathon race. It is a very long and challenging race. It cannot be completed with everyday habits and manners. In order to complete a marathon race one needs to carefully observe the advice of champions. So let us carefully observe the author's advice, who is a spiritual champion, how we can run the race of faith well. I pray, that by carefully following his advice we can also be world class champions of the spiritual race.

Firstly, the author encourages us to throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles in our race. The first and foremost duty of a runner, is to put off everything that hinders. If a marathon runner is burdened with a back pack, a smart phone and a Power bank, he cannot run well. In the same way, for example if two excellent teenagers, who are now in the final and decisive year of high school, burden themselves with watching YouTube and TikTok or sinning in other ways, they cannot run well. Likewise, we cannot run the race of faith well, when we are burdened with many sins, such as giving in to lustful desires, love for fun in this world, etc. Some think that it would be impossible to get rid of some sins. Without Jesus, that would be true. But in Jesus we can get rid of the sin and run the race of faith with high performance.

Secondly, we must keep running with perseverance in the race marked out for us. Many people start, but in the middle of the race, when it is getting hard or when they are experiencing some difficulties, they stop. In order to run with perseverance, we need to keep running especially when it is getting hard or when we face hardships and obstacles. Then, how can we keep running the race of faith with perseverance?

Let's read 12:2a: „...fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith.“ When one starts on a marathon race, one must clearly focus on the goal. One must put everything under achieving this goal. And one must not go left and right or even back, not even temporarily, but always run forward to the goal. Therefore, the author encouraged the Jewish Christians, to fix their eyes on Jesus. Why? Verse 2 says that Jesus is the pioneer and perfecter of faith. Jesus is the best example who ran the race of faith and fulfilled God's mission. Because Jesus fulfilled his mission faithfully and against all opposition, we were saved. Jesus alone is the truth, the way and the life, once for all and forever. Alone through Jesus we will come to the Father. That is why it is absolutely necessary to fix our eyes on Jesus. Without focusing on Jesus, it is very likely that we will drift away and miss the goal of our race of faith. Especially, one must not look to other gods or false Messiahs who promise to reach the goal without a struggle of faith. The Jewish Christians were probably tempted to follow other teachings than the gospel of Jesus, with the hope to find another way. But all those, who follow false Messiahs found themselves betrayed and in destruction. Then, how can we fix our eyes on Jesus?

Let's look at verses 2b and 3: „For the joy set before him he 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 sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.“ Fixing our eyes on Jesus means to look at Jesus who suffered for our salvation until death on the cross. When Jesus gave himself with a compassionate shepherd heart and with God's vision for many helpless people, the religious leaders persecuted him and wanted to murder him. The Jews, who cheered him on his entry

into Jerusalem with "Hosanna!", now shouted: "Crucify him! Crucify him!" But Jesus endured the cross. He scorned the shame. Through all sufferings and opposition, Jesus completed our salvation. Praise Jesus, who ran his race of faith from beginning to end and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. There he now waits for all those who believe in him and run the race of faith to the last goal with perseverance to hand over to them the glorious crown of righteousness.

There are many examples of men and women of faith who fixed their eyes on Jesus in the midst of unbearable suffering and triumphantly finished their race of faith. Polycarp was one of the church fathers in the second century in Asia Minor. Many Christians at that time had been seduced by Gnostic heresies that promised a way of salvation without spiritual struggle very similar to today's liberal theology. In the midst of persecution, Polycarp struggled to bring Christians back to Gospel faith. When Polycarp proclaimed the way of the Gospel of Jesus he was persecuted. This is a typical pattern of history. When one proclaims the way of Jesus, who endured the cross, one is persecuted. Polycarp was arrested at the age of 86. When he was asked to deny Jesus, he testified, "86 years have I served him, and he has done me no wrong. How can I blaspheme my King and my Savior?"

Thanks be to the Lord, who, in the midst of trials and hardships, allows us to fix our eyes on Jesus through the annual Global Leadership Empowerment Forum (GLEF). We could fix our eyes on Jesus through the inductive Bible study of the Gospel of Mark, the five books of Moses, Nehemiah, and Hebrews. Then we were encouraged to run the race of mobilizing the next generation as Bible teachers, disciple makers, messenger trainers, and global leaders with perseverance despite the spiritual turmoil of persecution and world-wide pandemic. In order to have this GLEF every year, we had to overcome obstacles again and again. But thank God for God's servants and all co-workers for faithfully preparing this year's GLEF despite many challenges. At this year's GLEF, we have seen that God raised our next generations as wonderful messengers, spiritual announcers, and well-versed bible lecturers and we see God's vision for them to become spiritual leaders for their society, for one nation and even for a continent.

One year after God's great blessing, I experienced Satan's attack that destroyed my marriage. But in this difficult time God's servants and my parents helped me to look up to Jesus, who endured so much opposition from sinners and scorned the shame in order to fulfill his mission to the end. God was and is always good. He used the trial to discipline me as a man of faith and to show me his absolute love. Jesus, who endured the cross and all opposition, gave me new courage and determination to keep running the race of faith for the heavenly calling with Deuteronomy 6:5. It is God's plan that I experience God's even more powerful work and receive the crown of righteousness by Jesus himself.

Let's read 12:2 again: „...fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.” Let us fix our eyes on Jesus and continue God's ministry with perseverance through disciple making ministry and the formation of 1:1 Bible study teams to send 100,000 missionaries to all countries by 2041.

In 12:4-11, the author teaches about the purpose of suffering. Actually, suffering is good and important. Why? Let's read 12:6,7: „...because the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and he chastens everyone he accepts as his son. Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as his children. For what children are not disciplined by their father?” Through suffering the Christians can actually be sure, that God loves them. God always used sufferings to discipline His beloved children. Through sufferings God's children grow from lowly people with petty desires into godly people who became leaders of history and were used for God's salvation ministry. God loved Joseph so that he disciplined him by letting him being sold into Egypt, putting him into prison to serve the dirty and dangerous people in prison. Then he could grow from a spoiled youngest son into a responsible leader for a nation whom God used to save many lives. He could also become a good shepherd for his brothers and save his family according to God's promise. May God encourage us to deeply accept God's disciplining love and guidance through suffering. Our God will raise each of us like Jesus as spiritual leaders for saving many lives and to write wonderful history of faith.

In 12:12-17, the author warns against considering God's discipline and love worthless in the midst of suffering. He cites Esau's example. When Esau rejected God's love through God's discipline, he was rejected by God. He became an apostate and a bitter root. Let us read verse 14: “Make every effort to live in peace with everyone and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord.” Making every effort to live in peace and to be holy means not rejecting God's grace like Esau, but accepting God's discipline as his love in the midst of suffering and building sacred fellowship of love through the grace of God. This was the true strength and influence of the first Christians. God worked powerfully through their heartfelt prayer vessel and loving fellowship in the sufferings of Christ, so that the Word of God could be proclaimed more and more boldly and Jesus' name could even be witnessed to the ends of the earth.

In 12:18-29, the author reminds the Jewish Christians of their final reward through their mediator Jesus Christ. In the old covenant, represented by Mount Sinai, the Israelites were very afraid to approach God. But by the one-sided grace of God through Jesus' death on the cross, we are allowed to come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem. Let's look at verse 24: „...to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.” It is through Jesus that we can enter into the new covenant

and receive God's wonderful gift of forgiveness. Through the blood of sprinkling, we also receive complete cleansing from our sins. Let us read 12:28: "Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe,..." Now, an unshakeable kingdom awaits us. Because of the redemptive grace and blessing of the unshakable kingdom of God, we can always be thankful and worship God with reverence and awe under all circumstances.

Thanks be to the Lord that in chapter 12 we were encouraged to always fix our eyes on Jesus in our race of faith. In the time of suffering, let us thankfully accept God's disciplining love and run the race of faith with perseverance for influential life together and disciple making. Our God will preciously use us as influential global leaders for the work of spiritual revival.

II. Let us go to him outside the camp (13:1-25)

In chapter 13, the author gives good advice for the practical life of faith.

The author urges and encourages us insistently and repeatedly to keep on loving each other as brothers, to show hospitality to strangers, to remember the prisoners, to honor marriage, and to guard ourselves from love of money (1-6).

We should remember and pray for our leaders and Bible teachers, who speak the word of God to us. As good children, we should imitate their faith and obey them so that they can do their work with joy (7,17).

In verses 10-14 the author draws on the Old Testament to help Jewish Christians to love Jesus' disgrace and follow him in his suffering, doing his salvation ministry.

Let us look at verses 11 and 12: "The high priest carries the blood of animals into the Most Holy Place as a sin offering, but the bodies are burned outside the camp. And so Jesus also suffered outside the city gate to make the people holy through his own blood." On the Day of Atonement, the blood of the sacrificial animals was brought to the Most Holy Place. But the bodies of the animals were burned outside the camp, in a place of shame that was despised, where the unclean people were living, and where criminals were executed.

In the same way, Jesus was also despised and crucified outside the city of Jerusalem. Thus, he was shamefully excluded from the holy community. But it was a shame that Jesus willingly took on himself, in order to sanctify us once and for all. Praise Jesus, who left the camp and bore the disgrace for our sin. Because Jesus left the camp and bore the disgrace, we were cleansed of all transgressions and sins once and for

all. Because Jesus bore the disgrace, we received God's perfect sanctification and redemption. Because of Christ's disgrace, God no longer wants to remember our sin and unrighteousness.

Let us read 13:13 together: "Let us, then, go to him outside the camp, bearing the disgrace he bore." Here the author encourages us to go to Jesus, leaving the camp of dead works completely and to participate in the suffering of Jesus for saving many lives. For we do not encounter Jesus within the camp, only enjoying his grace, but we will meet Jesus again outside the camp when we participating in his suffering.

William Carey, also called the father of modern missions, went out of the camp to India as a missionary with the prayer to convert this country full of idolatry and superstition to God. Then he experienced resistance from the Indish government. In addition, there were various illnesses and the death of his son. His wife threatened him with a knife to return to England. But in this time of disgrace he testified, "This is indeed the valley of the shadow of death to me. But I rejoice that I am here, notwithstanding; and God is here."

Watchman Nee, who was a Chinese preacher in the 20th century experienced the Chinese government's harsh persecution against the Christian church. Those who did not submit to the Communist Party were considered the "enemy of the people". Watchman Nee chose to be one of these "enemies of the people." So he learned to go out of the camp to Jesus and bear his disgrace. He devoted himself with all his strength to Bible study and founded many influential churches. The last 20 years of his life, he remained in prison. Was his 20-year imprisonment a lost time? Was it in vain that he bore the disgrace of Christ? No, his patient suffering in love for the disgrace of Christ Jesus was spread throughout the world, that numerous Christians all over the world were encouraged not to swim with the flow of the spirit of the time, but to go out of their comfort zone and to bear the disgrace of Jesus.

We have experienced a wonderful time through GLEF 2022. Now it is time for us, to go outside the camp, not to indulge in sin or to fall into our own lives, but to participate in Jesus' glorious disgrace. Let us go outside the camp to the campuses to establish 1:1 bible study teams. Let us go outside the camp to establish 120 mission base camps in the M countries until the ends of the earth. Let us go outside the camp to conquer the online world. By going outside the camp, leaving our comfort zones, and participating in Jesus' disgrace, we will meet Jesus again. Let us bear the disgrace of Jesus and serve the disciple making ministry fruitfully and influentially.

Furthermore, the author exhorts us in verses 15 and 16: "Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise—the fruit of lips that openly profess his name. And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased." Let us renew God's wonderful grace again and

again and always praise God out of our deep gratitude, because we have reason to praise God: such sacrifices please God. „Ten thousand reasons for my heart to find. Bless the Lord oh my soul, oh my soul. Worship His Holy name. Sing like never before, oh my soul. I'll worship Your Holy name.”

Today we learned that in our struggle of faith, we can always look to Jesus and follow him, with perseverance, growing through God's discipline and receiving the crown of life. We have also learned to go out of the camp like Jesus and participate in Jesus' glorious disgrace through carrying out God's mission for world campus mission. By doing so, God bless you to live as global leaders, spiritual conquerors, and even world changers. God bless Europe, America, Russia, Ukraine and Turkey to be used as kingdom of priests and holy nations.

Let us read 12:2: “...fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.”