

Look to Jesus!

Isaiah 45:15–25, Hebrews 12:1–3

We take a break from our regular series this morning to look at a very encouraging text from the book of Hebrews: “looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith,” which has been on my heart this week: “looking unto *Jesus*.”

It ought to be self-evident that *Christ* is to be the central focus of the church’s teaching, worship and fellowship. Christ is the eternal Word. The word of Christ is to be in the saint’s hearts and on our lips. We are to encourage, counsel, teach and admonish one another with the Word. Pastors and elders are to be ministers of the Word. For the church, what *Christ* thinks about any matter trumps what anyone else thinks. In the church, the opinion of Christ rules!

The letter to the Hebrews was written to encourage converts from Judaism who had become discouraged by the difficulties they were facing and had taken their eyes off Christ. These Hebrew-Christians were considering walking away from Christ and returning to Judaism. Judaism enjoyed a certain amount of recognition by the Roman authorities, who saw the Jewish religion as a means of keeping the peace and staving off revolt. The early Hebrew-Christians missed the familiarity of the temple rituals. They needed to be reminded that “it is impossible for those who were once enlightened . . . if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance.”¹

The author of this letter addresses his recipients as fellow-members of the church. We see this in the opening words: “God . . . has in these last days spoken to *us* by His Son.” Notice the plural: “to *us*.” That theme continues throughout the book: “Therefore . . . let *us* go on to perfection, not laying again the foundation of repentance,”² and in our present text: “let *us* lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us . . . let *us* run with endurance the race that is set before us.” It is as though the author were saying: “You are my brothers and sisters in Christ. We have enjoyed sweet fellowship together. Remain faithful! Do not go back on your commitment to Christ. Let us run with endurance the race that is set before us.” Running a race is not for the lazy and half-hearted; it requires diligent training, commitment and keeping one’s eyes on the goal. To finish a race requires endurance, the characteristic of a man who is not swerved from his deliberate purpose and loyalty, even in the midst of the greatest trials and sufferings.³

Commitment to Christ is a race. We need to lay aside every weight—anything that would hold us back. We need to practice the faith with the greatest resolve. And we need, above all else, not to become sidetracked but to keep our eyes on the goal: Christ. *He* is the one whom we must please. He is the Lover of our souls,

¹ Heb. 6:4–6

² Heb. 6:1

³ Adapted from James Strong, *Enhanced Strong’s Lexicon*, ὑπομονή (Logos Bible Software)

who shed his precious blood for our salvation. We must never give up, never abandon him, but be faithful to the end. To finish the race, keeping our eyes on Christ, ultimately hearing his “Well done,” will be worth it. A runner in a race must keep his eyes on the goal. If he flinches, looking at the other runners or at the crowds, he won’t win.

Brothers and sisters, the Christian life is a grander endeavor than any footrace, and keeping one’s eyes on Christ is absolutely essential. God does not promise that life will be easy, or that we will not encounter any problems. “Let us run *with endurance* the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith.” Amen!

I have five points this morning: (1) In sorrow; (2) In temptation; (3) In salvation; (4) In uncertainty; (5) In despair. First,

1. In sorrow

As we go through life in this vale of tears we are sure to experience sorrow. When Adam sinned, he brought death and sorrow upon the whole human race. He was banished from the Garden of Eden. He could never eat from the tree of life. Adam was a public person, our covenant head. He represented the whole human race, of which he was our first father. When he sinned, he sinned on behalf of our whole race. The Scriptures tell us, “As in Adam all die.”⁴ That “all” includes every one of us.

Death is the termination of life. “It is appointed unto man once to die” (Heb. 9:27). Adam was made of the dust of the ground; God breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul. Man is therefore *two* parts: body; and soul, or spirit. Death is the separation of the soul or spirit from the body. Ecclesiastes 12:7 teaches, “Then the dust will return to the earth as it was, and the spirit will return to God who gave it.” So Psalm 104:29: “You hide Your face, they are troubled; You take away their breath, they die and return to their dust.”

Death is not the end. After death comes the judgment. At the resurrection at the last day, the soul or spirit will be reunited to the body. But in the meantime we mourn and sorrow. As Christians “we sorrow not, even as others who have no hope.”⁵ That does not mean we never sorrow, but we do not sorrow without hope. The Lord Jesus wept at the tomb of Lazarus. He knows our frame, he remembers that we are dust. Jesus stood before the tomb and cried out, “Lazarus, come forth!” Scripture testifies that “he that was dead came forth, bound hand and foot with graveclothes: and his face was bound about with a napkin. Jesus told startled mourners, ‘Loose him, and let him go.’”

⁴ 1 Cor. 15:22

⁵ 1 Thess. 4:13

The Lord Jesus Christ has power over death. He is the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in him shall never die spiritually but is united to him in his death and resurrection.

This past week a prominent doctor in our community, who was active in the pro-life movement and had a reputation for praying with his patients, died suddenly while jogging, struck by a pickup truck. I met him myself when I took one of our granddaughters to a doctor appointment a few years back. He had nine children and one grandchild; he is survived by his parents.

A single death affects many in our community: a wife without a husband, children without a parent, parents without a son, brothers and sisters without a sibling, patients without a doctor—and on and on. The driver of the pickup stayed at the scene of the accident and called 911—can you imagine the feelings of remorse?

When we face death, we need to look to Jesus. He is the man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. We who know and love him take courage, knowing that he understands, and that by his death we live eternally. He is the only one who could say, “Because I live, ye shall live also.” Nothing can separate us from the love of Christ. In him we are victorious.

Are you experiencing sorrow? Know that whatever happens in your life is for a purpose. The Christian, with Paul, can glory in tribulation. God is in control; at every moment he is working all things according to the counsel of his will. One day we will understand. There is comfort in Jesus. Look to him! Amen!

2. In temptation

Temptation has two senses: it can mean a trial, being put to the test. Genesis records: “Now it came to pass after these things that God *tested* Abraham . . . He said, ‘Take now your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you’” (Gen. 22:1–3). God put Abraham’s faith to the test; Abraham passed the test. His obedience to God in the face of this great trial showed that his faith was real.

But ordinarily *temptation* means *solicitation to evil*. Satan, the devil, is called the *tempter* (Matt. 4:3). He does *not* have our best interest at heart. He wants us to deny Christ and obey *him* instead. *He* wants to be our master. Satan wants to be lord! But he is a usurper. We are to have nothing to do with him. His goal is to destroy us.

He is also a liar. He doesn’t reveal his true intentions. He doesn’t come to us and say, “Obey me, so I can destroy you and take you to hell”—no! Satan masquerades as an angel of light. He comes and says, “You shall *not* surely die! God is keeping you from achieving happiness. Follow me instead; I’ll show you a *really* good time.”

God says, “Walk in my paths and be faithful—they are the path of life. In my presence is fulness of joy. If you put me first, I will bless you beyond what you are able to ask or think.”

In our modern age, temptation is especially dangerous. Cell phones are ubiquitous. Most of us carry around a source of temptation right in our pockets. As we search the internet, ads pop up without warning. They make sin so alluring: “Look at this,” “Eat this,” “Drink this,” “Swallow this pill,” “Smoke this,” “Vape this,” “Buy this,” “Sign up for this,” “Click here to win”—and on and on it goes. No longer do you have to go to the tavern, the racetrack, the house of ill repute, where someone may see you, and news might get around. Think of the allure of internet porn, gambling, gaming, buying. You can enjoy sin in the privacy of your own home. And with every tap or keystroke you are training the internet to know what it is you like. The internet quickly learns what it needs to do to tempt you. Some parents allow their children unrestricted and unsupervised access to the internet—that is an abdication of our Christian duty.

The Bible tells us to pursue wisdom, truth, godliness—“whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things” (Phil. 4:8). It tells us to develop discernment, to flee fornication, to forsake lying vanities, to keep ourselves pure, to remember our Creator in the days of our youth, to seek the Lord while he may be found.

An older lady was recounting how, when she was in high school, her dad’s only advice was: “Don’t come home pregnant!” He failed to teach her how to flee temptation and keep herself as a pure vessel fit for the Master’s use. He failed to read her the Holy Scriptures. All he said was, “Don’t come home pregnant.” Parents ought to read the Proverbs to their children. “My son, hear the instruction of thy father, and forsake not the law of thy mother. . . . Cease, my son, to hear the instruction that causeth to err from the words of knowledge.”⁶

Jesus teaches us to pray, “Lead us not into temptation.” He doesn’t say, “*Listen* to the voice of temptation as much as you can.” He says, “Flee fornication.” “Flee youthful lusts.”

If you are experiencing temptation, look to Jesus! Take his yoke upon you and learn of him. Redeem the time, because the days are evil. Don’t wait for tomorrow. The time is short—*today* is the day of salvation. Remember your Creator in the days of your youth.

3. In salvation

⁶ Prov. 1:8, 19:27

In our Old Testament text the Lord is called the “God of Israel, the *Savior*.” Did you hear the words? “Israel shall be *saved* by the LORD with an everlasting *salvation*.” God says, “There is no other God besides Me, a just God and a *Savior* . . . Look to Me, and be *saved*, all you ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other.”

These words—“*Savior*,” “*saved*,” “*salvation*”—come from the same Hebrew root as the word *Joshua*, which means Jehovah is Savior. It is the name that comes into the New Testament as *Jesus*. “She shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins” (Matt. 1:21). From what does Jesus save his people? From their *sins*! How does he do that? As we *look* to him: “Look to Me, and be *saved*.”

The Bible teaches that we cannot save ourselves. Why? Because God’s standard is absolute perfection. Our sins defile us, they befoul us, they render us filthy, soiled, stained. The other night we put a newly washed tablecloth on the kitchen table. It looked and smelled so nice. Yesterday, when we came back from taking family to the airport, we heated up some black beans. As I served them, a couple black beans slipped off the spoon and landed on that freshly washed tablecloth. I picked them up with a fork right away, but, as you can imagine, they left a stain. I got a washcloth and removed the residue. The stain was still there. I sprayed on some laundry stain remover. The stain was lighter, but it was still there.

That’s the way sin is. When we sin, it defiles us. *Defile* means to make unclean or impure. Sin stains us. Try as we might, we cannot wash away the defilement of our sin. The Bible teaches that only the blood of Christ can wash away our sin.

In Isaiah 1, God says, “*Wash* you, make you *clean*; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil . . . Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.”

We see the same lesson in 1 John: “if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son *cleanseth* us from all sin. . . . If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to *cleanse* us from all unrighteousness.”

All of us need to be saved. We need our sins washed away. We need to be cleansed by the cleansing blood of Jesus. The hymnwriter expressed it well: “all for sin could not atone; thou must save, and thou alone. . . . *foul*, I to the Fountain fly; *wash* me, Savior, or I die.”⁷

Do you understand that you have sinned, that you are sinner and cannot wash away the stain of your sin yourself?

⁷ <https://www.trinitypsalterhymnal.org/hymns/rock-of-ages-cleft-for-me/>

Salvation is in Christ alone, and the way to receive it is to look to Jesus. His Word says, “Look to Me, and be saved.” That is the gospel. Jesus speaks the truth and would never deceive us. Do you want to be saved? Look to Jesus. He will save you. He will take away your love of sinning. He will make you a new creature. Old things will pass away; all things will become new. He will give you joy and peace and purpose. Look to Jesus!

4. In uncertainty

Often in life problems arise and we do not know where to turn. There is no easy solution. Paul said, “I am in a *strait betwixt two*.”⁸ Paul didn’t know how to pray. He wanted to go to heaven and be with Christ, for that would be so much better. Yet he wanted to remain in the flesh for the sake of the Philippians. Sometimes in life we face two choices. Sometimes it is a choice between good and evil. God wants us to choose the good and reject the evil. His Word—the word of Christ—gives us wisdom to make the good choice and not the bad. But sometimes both options are righteous and good, neither is sinful; both would glorify God. What should we do? Should we go to this place or that place? Should we take this course of study or that course of study? Should we take this job or that job? Should we take this person or that person as a life-partner? We should look to Jesus. *He* is the source of wisdom. He is the wisdom of God and the power of God. We should seek his face in prayer. We should consider godly counselors—parents, family, church elders. We should pray that the light of his countenance would shine upon us. If we lack wisdom, we should ask God, through the mediation of Christ and power of his Holy Spirit.

Fifth,

5. In despair

In 2 Corinthians 4:8 Paul wrote: “We are hard-pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are *perplexed*, but not *in despair*; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed.” The word translated *despair* comes from a root meaning to be in doubt; this is the intensified form of the word. Paul says he is not in despair—but earlier in this epistle, in 1:8, he had written of the “trouble which came to us in Asia: that we were burdened beyond measure, above strength, so that we *despaired* even of life.” How do we reconcile these two statements? As a general rule, Paul was not in despair; his faith sustained him. But in Acts 19, when he was in Ephesus, the silversmiths incited a large mob to cry out—for two hours straight—“Great is Diana of the Ephesians!” He had to leave Ephesus. As he reflected on his sudden exit he apparently thought himself a failure. He *despaired* of life. He had had such a rich and fulfilling ministry in that city. He had found disciples there and had instructed them about the ministry of the Holy Spirit. He

⁸ Phil. 1:23

preached in the synagogues for three months, then held a Bible institute for two years in the school of Tyrannus. Now, because so many people were coming to Christ that it began to affect the silversmiths' business, there had been a riot, and he had to suddenly get out of town. It affected him so much that he despaired even of life.

Sometimes Christians feel like that. They experience depression. They go into a funk, and it is hard to get out. But the Word of Christ offers help. Psalm 42:11 asks, "Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? *hope thou in God*: for I shall yet praise him, who is the *health of my countenance*, and my God." This refrain occurs three times. "Hope *thou* in God"—the Psalmist uses the singular here; it pictures a believer separated from the flock. Part of healing from depression comes in being in regular fellowship with the flock. Don't stay away from worship!

Dear saint of God, look to Jesus! You are a Christian, and Christ must have first place. Look to him in sorrow, in temptation, in salvation, in uncertainty, in despair. He must be your Guide, your wisdom, your purpose, and your all-in-all. Amen.