

LET US FIX OUR EYES ON JESUS

2016 New Year's Message

Hebrews 12:1-29

Key Verses: 1b-2

“And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, 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.”

Happy New Year! Moses said in Psalm 90, the only psalm credited to him, **“Our days... quickly pass, and we fly away”** (Ps 90:10). As we begin a new year, it is good to think about how to live our one precious life. In today's changing world, many things distract us. We need a clear goal in life and source of strength and power. The Christians in the first century faced challenges from the world as well. The author told them to fix their eyes on Jesus, for Jesus is the solution to their problems. **“Jesus is the same yesterday and today and forever”** (13:8). Let's think about why we should fix our eyes on Jesus, as we run the race marked out for us.

I. We Are Running A Race (1)

Verse 1 reads, **“Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.”** The Jewish Christians in the first century were under persecutions from both the Jews and the Gentiles. They started strong. Due to hardships they faced on the way, however, they lost heart and grew weary. The author reminds them that their life of faith was like a long range marathon. During my college years at the Korean military academy, I was a marathon runner for my company. In the middle of the race, I used to face a moment that I felt like giving up. Marathoners call it “hitting the wall.” Those who overcome the wall with perseverance can finish the full course. As God's chosen people, we should deeply accept that we are called to run the full course race marked out for us. All who finish this race are winners far greater than the gold medalists in the Olympics. For our destination is the heavenly city where God our Father and our Lord Jesus are with the glorified saints and holy angels. Can you imagine the glory of the heavenly kingdom?

In this glorious race, we are in different stages. Mother Barry has run the race for over 60 years after she received God's calling during her college days. Yet she is still running at full speed. How would you rate your own race? Are you running in high spirits? That's great, keep it up! Are you tired? Discouraged? Exhausted? Complacent?

In this race, we are not alone. The author reminds us that we are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses. The witnesses refer to the heroes of

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faith mentioned in the previous chapter. Those men and women foresaw Christ and finished their race of life on earth victoriously by God's power. They witness that God is living and faithful. Their examples of faith encourage us that we too can finish our race by God's power. We almost hear a great cloud of witnesses saying to us, "Friend, you are not alone. We have gone through all your struggles. The Lord is with you. Come on, cheer up!" As we live differently from the people of the world, we often feel lonely. But we are not alone. Even today, innumerable saints are running the race with us. When we look at our UBF community, we find many witnesses who are encouraging us, beginning with our founders. How should we run the race?

II. Throw Off Every Weight And Sin (1b)

Verse 1b says, "**Let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles.**" Here "**everything that hinders**" means a "weight." Can you imagine a runner at the starting line, wearing boots, a winter coat and a backpack? Of course he cannot run very far. Likewise, Christians cannot run the race of faith with baggage. The baggage can be many things, like attachment to worldly hopes, human recognition or attention. Worries of this life, human conflict or competition drag us down as well. We should throw these off continually.

Discouragement is another hindrance we should throw off. When we don't see visible fruit in our life, we feel like Abraham who remained childless after years of life in the promised land. Many of the heroes of faith in chapter 11 experienced victories and successes by God's power. On the other hand, many of them also boldly faced sufferings and loss by God's power. The author points out that "**they did not receive the things promised**" (11:13). The best things promised that they looked forward to were not earthly but heavenly. Whether successful or not in the world, they lived by faith in the invisible God (Heb 11:6). The object of our faith is not visible blessings or successes, but the invisible God who is our very great Reward (Ge 15:1). We should remember many missionaries of the past who did not see any fruit of their labor for many years or decades. Some were even martyred before they started evangelism. But God amazingly worked to bring the gospel light to the people for whom they dedicated their lives. God will fulfill his purpose in our lives in his time in his way, if we continue to seek and serve him wholeheartedly.

And there is sin that so easily entangles. Here "**so easily entangles**" literally describes a surprise attack that holds someone down. Sin is like a football player who tackles and holds down a runner. The most serious sin we must avoid is unbelief, for it is the cause of all other sins. And the most tenacious sins for both man and woman may be lust, jealousy, pride and hypocrisy. In this time of moral crisis, people are exposed to sexual images and tempted by adultery. Jealousy and hypocrisy easily entangle anyone who seeks the pride of life and people's recognition rather than living before God. How

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can we throw these sins off? Ephesians 4:22 says, **“Put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires.”** We should fight against our old self, that is our sinful nature, until we say “No” to its deceitful desires. We can win this spiritual victory by depending on Jesus who is our High Priest forever. He is able to help us in our temptations (1:18).

III. Fix Our Eyes On Jesus (2-3)

In a race, a runner should know the right goal. Athletes run full strength by fixing their eyes on the goal. So the author says, **“...fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross...”** (2a). Jesus is the goal in our race of faith. The world is full of things that distract us. Oftentimes we look at people or our ministry, rather than Jesus. So we should daily turn our eyes away from distractions and refocus on Jesus. Why should we fix our eyes on Jesus?

First, Jesus is the Pioneer and Perfecter of our faith. Hebrews 2:10 says that God made Jesus, the pioneer of our salvation, perfect through what he suffered. Jesus is the eternal Word, the Son of God (Jn 1:1, 14). But he emptied himself of his glory as God and became a man. He did not come as a noble; he came as a poor countryman. He took the lowest place so that he might become a friend to us all. Though he served us with God’s love and truth, he was despised and rejected. He became a man of suffering, and familiar with pain. He was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities (Isa 53:3-5). When Jesus breathed his last on the cross, he said, **“It is finished”** (Jn 19:30). Jesus fulfilled all of God’s promises for our salvation. In this way, Jesus became our perfect Savior and the pioneer and perfecter of our faith.

This perfect Savior Jesus is our merciful and faithful High Priest (2:17). Having been tempted in every way, just as we are, he empathizes with our weaknesses. He is interceding for us at the right hand of God 24/7 (Ro 8:34). Because of his intercession, God forgives our sins whenever we look up to Jesus and confess our sins by faith. So we can always rise from our failures and run the race. Daily we need energy to run. Where does the energy come from? Jesus said, **“I am the bread of life.... For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink.”** (Jn 6:35,55) When we are spiritually hungry and thirsty, Jesus feeds us and fills us. When we are weary and tired, Jesus is right there with us to lift us up. We should come to Jesus every day to eat his flesh and drink his blood. Do you feel inadequate due to your failures and sins? Come to Jesus; he will cleanse you by his precious blood and lift you up to rise and run. Do you feel weary and tired? Come to Jesus, he will nourish and strengthen you with the bread of life and living water.

Second, Jesus is the Way to supreme glory. Jesus is the only way to the Father (Jn 14:6). Jesus is also the pioneer and perfecter of the way that leads to supreme glory. Verse 2b reads, **“For the joy set before him he endured the**

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cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.” The way Jesus went ahead for us is the way of the cross and glory. The cross was the symbol of the greatest pain and shame. For anyone, shame is most unbearable. So even criminals try to hide their faces from camera flashes. Jesus was mocked, beaten, spit on, flogged and crucified like the worst criminal in the world. In his excruciating pain and thirst on the cross, he refused to drink a painkiller. He endured all these in order to fully bear the pain and shame we deserve for our sins.

Jesus endured the cross for the joy set before him. During his earthly ministry, his joy was carrying out the Father’s will by giving life to sinners (Jn 4:32). What was the joy Jesus looked forward to? He looked forward to drawing all of his people including you and me to God through his sacrifice (Jn 12:32). Jesus also looked forward to his resurrection, ascension, and his reunion with the Father in glory (Jn 17:5). Jesus knew that the Father would exalt him to the highest place and give him the name that is above every name (Php 2:9). He prayed in John 17:13, **“I am coming to you now, but I say these things while I am still in the world, so that those who believe may have the full measure of my joy within them.”** Even before his crucifixion, Jesus was full of joy. Jesus prayed that we too may have the full measure of his joy. Don’t you want to have the full measure of Jesus’ joy? How can we have Jesus’ joy?

Jesus said, **“Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me”** (Mk 8:34). After his resurrection, Jesus said, **“I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God”** (Jn 20:17). Then he said to his disciples, **“As the Father has sent me, I am sending you”** (Jn 20:21). By redeeming us to be God’s children, Jesus became our elder brother and called us to do our Father’s world salvation work together. What a great privilege for us to become God’s children and co-workers! Jesus calls us to take up our cross for world mission so that we may have the full measure of his joy. When we see our Bible students find life in Jesus through our ministry, the Holy Spirit fills us with Jesus’ joy. The world cannot give us this heavenly joy. Yet our utmost joy is the hope of our reunion with the Father and our Lord Jesus in glory. In that day, the Lord, the Righteous Judge, will reward all our labor for the gospel and his kingdom. The Lord will wipe every tear from our eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain (Rev 21:4). We will all be like the angels in the splendor of our immortal bodies. With this joy set before us, we can run the race along the way that our Lord Jesus went ahead of us.

As we invite students to Bible study, we receive many rejections and false email addresses. Sometimes we face opposition and persecution. The pain is greater when opposition comes from those whom we love and have served for a long period. What does the author tell us to do in such times? Read verse 3, **“Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.”** It is totally unreasonable that creatures

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oppose God the Creator. But that was what sinful people did to God the Son. Jesus, however, endured such opposition from sinners. On the cross, he prayed, **“Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing”** (Lk 23:34a). In our pains, we should think about Jesus. Jesus suffers with us when we suffer for him (Ac 9:4). Especially we should think about how the Lord Jesus has endured our sinfulness and weaknesses. Then we can forgive anyone and pray for the person as Jesus did.

The glorified Lord who sits at the right hand of the throne of God has been given all authority in heaven and on earth (Mt 28:18). In these end times, he is calling you and me to share his remaining sufferings for saving unreached souls (Col 1:24). With his almighty power and authority, he promised, **“Surely I am with you always”** (Mt 28:20). Numerous men and women including our UBF missionaries and shepherds have responded to King Jesus’ calling.

Charles T. Studd (1860-1931), known as the leader of the Cambridge Seven, received the Lord’s calling at the age of 24. He disowned his future as a nationally renowned cricket player and heir of great wealth. When asked if he had made too great a sacrifice, he answered, “If Jesus Christ be God and died for me, then no sacrifice can be too great for me to make for him.” He dedicated his life to the missions in China and India. As years went by, his love of Christ did not weaken, but rather grew stronger. At the age of 50, he went to central Congo and dedicated the remaining 21 years of his life for people in Africa. He left a poem a part of which reads,

Only one life, yes only one,
Now let me say, “Thy will be done”;
And when at last I’ll hear the call,
I know I’ll say “‘twas worth it all”;
Only one life, ‘twill soon be past,
Only what’s done for Christ will last.

Humanly he suffered much. When he finished his race on earth, however, he was full of thanks. In a letter he wrote, “As I am nearing my departure from this world, I have but a few things to rejoice: God called me to China and I went; I joyfully acted as Christ told the rich young man to act. My only joys therefore are that when God has given me a work to do, I have not refused it.” We know that he had the full measure of Jesus’ joy. May God guide all of us to run the race after Jesus, the way to supreme glory, and have the full measure of his joy.

Endure Hardships As Discipline From Our Loving Father (4-29)

Verses 4-13 teach us about the good work God is doing in us during our race of faith. It is to sanctify us to share in his holiness, like refining golden ore in fire to produce pure gold. Verse 7 reads, **“Endure hardship as discipline;**

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God is treating you as his children.” As God’s dear children, we all undergo discipline from our loving Father. Verse 14b says, **“Without holiness no one will see the Lord.”** God uses all hardships in our life to make us holy so that we may have fellowship with our wonderful Lord now and forever.

Recently I read M. Rebecca Choi’s heart-moving poems. She has suffered from breast cancer, a stroke and her youngest son’s chronic illness. She accepted them as God’s discipline, fixing her eyes on Jesus. She wrote: “In Jesus, suffering is a good medicine. Suffering makes our hearts pure. In his providence, the Lord gave me his divine discipline according to his will. So nothing is strange or shameful and I praise God!” She confessed, “I realized that participating in Christ’s suffering is the highest glory and joy. I learned how to glorify God through all things.” **“Jesus, Son though he was, learned obedience through what he suffered”** (5:8). We should not take God’s discipline lightly or lose heart. Those who have been trained by it through humble obedience are truly beautiful and precious.

Look at verses 12-13. **“Therefore, strengthen your feeble arms and weak knees. ‘Make level paths for your feet,’ so that the lame may not be disabled, but rather healed.”** Due to hardships, sometimes we lose strength in our arms and knees. In such times, we should remember the love of God. We should also remember that all Christians are undergoing discipline from our loving Father. When anyone in our community is weakened, we should encourage and pray for that brother or sister. God will heal. We as a community should continue the race toward God’s kingdom together.

We live in a world that is shaky. As Jesus’ return nears, we will see more shaking in this world. But we are not disturbed, for we know that history is moving toward the glorious Second Coming of our Lord. There is only one thing that never shakes—the eternal kingdom of God. Since we are receiving this eternal kingdom, let us be thankful and worship and serve God acceptably with reverence and awe (28-29).

What do people today need most? God said in Amos 8:11, **“I will send a famine through the land—not a famine of food or a thirst for water, but a famine of hearing the words of the Lord.”** In this high tech era with a flood of information, people wander, searching for the word of God. God raised UBF to take care of young people who are like sheep without a shepherd. God blessed UBF by sending out 1,800 lay missionaries to reach out the campuses in 102 countries. Shepherding requires sacrifice and suffering. When our missionaries went out by faith, remembering the grace of the Good Shepherd Jesus, the Lord has faithfully kept his promise to be with them. Many UBF chapters have grown to be beautiful churches with people of multiple generations and ethnicities. Yet the two thirds of the 102 countries have only one UBF chapter. There are numerous cities and countries in the world that need missionaries and shepherds. College students are in their prime of life preparing for their future. They are the

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future hope of our societies, nations and the world. I believe God's heart to reach out to these young people in all cities and campuses of the world is constant.

Now is the time for us to renew our vision and rekindle the passion for world campus mission. To carry out the remaining task of world mission, we need to grow further in holiness to be used by God continually. I have this vision for our UBF community: (1) All leaders in our ministry continually fix our eyes on Jesus and grow to bear the image of the Good Shepherd Jesus; (2) All leaders raise disciples as Jesus raised his disciples by showing them his own example and teaching them God's word of truth; (3) God sends out thousands of missionaries, both young and old, from USA/Canada and UBF worldwide to the end of the earth.

Our days quickly pass, but we thank God who has set eternity in our hearts (Ecc 3:11). Thank the Lord Jesus who has become our Savior, Sustainer and the Way by going the path of the cross and glory. C. S. Lewis said, "All that is not eternal is eternally useless." Let's turn our eyes away from all temporal things and refocus our eyes on Jesus, our eternal King. Let's run the race marked out for us with perseverance, fixing our eyes on Jesus until the end.