

**Reading:** Hebrews 12:1-13

**Theme:** Looking unto Jesus.

Last week we considered On Your Marks - are we in the race and on away to heaven? If so, are we prepared to persevere, stick at it, to endure hard times? The race is marked out for each and every believer and yet we are not on our own because we run alongside and with each other. This allows us to help and to encourage each other on in the things of God. Not only this, we have the work and person of the Holy Spirit too, as well as the help and encouragement of God the Father God the Son. We also considered Get Set – we are to lay aside those things that would be unnecessary baggage - weights, cares, concerns, desires, even those things which are not wrong in and of themselves as they can weigh us down. We are specifically told to get rid of the sin that will ensnare us and hinder us and our progress. This evening we are focusing on Go - for we are to be going on in this race and v2-3 especially tells us how we have to run and go on in this life Christian race.

The author has reminded us of the cloud of witnesses, the Hall of Fame of God's people – as we saw in chapter 11, but it also includes all Christians of history that have gone before us, as these all witness to us that ordinary people like us, with trust and faith in God can keep on going on and finish the race.

Here the author tells us and his first readers two main things we are to do as we are going and go on in the race – fix our eyes on, looking unto Jesus and consider Him. Here are 2 deliberate actions. First of all, we are to fix our eyes on, looking unto Jesus. It is very forceful here. Its tense emphasises *“be the ones who are continually looking unto,*

*fixing your eyes upon Jesus*” (present active participle); the actual word itself, which is used only here in NT, is a very dramatic word. Something I experienced many years ago - there I was, in a big gathering, had seen family and friends and had brief chats with them. Then some music started, I and the rest of the people stood up and I just glanced behind me, there she was - my bride coming up the aisle. At that moment all friends and family were secondary and my focus was on my Siân. This is the force of the word here - “*to look away from one thing, so as to see another, to concentrate the gaze on*”. So “*fix*” is a great translation, “*gaze*” or “*looking only unto*” are brilliant also.

In this race, as we run with endurance, perseverance, we are to only have eyes for Jesus. He is to be the object of our hearts deepest truest desire. He is to be our all in all, we are to be constantly turning our eyes upon Jesus...

Athletes in the ancient pan- Hellenistic games trained for years with one aim in view - to win the olive crown (*the gold-medal of their day*). When they competed at the Olympia games, as they prepared to run the 5<sup>th</sup> and final event, at the end of the track, there hung on a pole was the olive crown and it was clearly in their view as they ran the race. As we go on, we are to fix our eyes on Jesus as both the example and the prize of our Christian life. We are to constantly focus, refocus our life priorities, desires, lifestyle and motives with our eyes fixed upon Him. That is the first thing we are to do. Secondly, we are to “*consider*” - which means *to ponder, think over and consider*”. This also has to be done - it is an imperative, a command which has to be done and kept on being done - constantly ponder and consider Jesus and all He went through

- using Him as our example, motivation and encouragement. This means we are to go on fixing our eyes on and considering this one. The writer draws our attention to 3 things to help us:

### **1. Jesus As Our Pioneer.**

Who is it that we are to look to, fix our eyes upon and consider? We are told simply here, it is Jesus. Our attention is not drawn to the Lord Jesus, or Jesus Christ. The emphasis here is on Jesus - His human name and nature is emphasised. If you read through the book of Hebrews you will see that at certain times the writer brings to prominence the real humanity of our Saviour and he does so at the times when he wants his readers to note Jesus' sympathy or His sufferings e.g. 4:15 we are told He was tempted in every way as we are and yet was without sin - He knew the full power of temptation and sin's attraction, but He resisted and never sinned. This means He can sympathise with us. Yet because He never sinned, He has not been desensitized and hardened by sin's corruption and so His sympathy is a complete and pure sympathy for us. This is the One we are to focus on and we will see, realise that He knows what we go through and sympathises with us and is able to help us. We are not directed to focus on an uncaring, hard, callous tyrant, but One who has gone ahead of us and has been through worse than we could ever go through.

Our focus is to be on Jesus the Author, the Founder, the Pioneer of our faith. He has done all that is necessary for the faith of all His people. The great crowd from Hebrews 11 will say "*Amen*" and "*Yes*" to that; believers from the 1<sup>st</sup>-century to the 21<sup>st</sup>-century will say the same. We who are believers here will echo our own agreement. The word "*author*" can

mean “a chief, a leader or a Prince; an author; one that takes the lead in anything; an example, a forerunner, a pioneer”.

Among these Hebrew Christians were some who were finding the going tough, the way hard for they were going a new way from their national and spiritual heritage and at times they were really hurting. To correct their feelings and vision, the writer says “*Look to Jesus - He’s been there ahead of you, He’s prepared the way, He has cleared the way and if it is hard for you, then realise, focus on what the pioneer of our faith went through!*”

In the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries people would leave their own countries - UK or Europe and head off to America. Once there, the father could go and often would head off into the interior, clear some land, build a house, establish the place and send for the family to come after him and to him. He was the pioneer, the one who prepared all for his loved ones to follow and when they arrived, hard as it may have been, all should have been prepared.

Our Saviour Jesus has gone first, gone ahead and He has opened up for us the land of faith, the way has been cleared, the way prepared and more than that, He has prepared a place for us. On our part it involves faith and trust, as it did on His part also, for He walked obediently to His Father’s will and purpose and He did so without deviation from that path as He pioneered and opened up this way for us.

He is our Priest and Pioneer and in them both He identified with our humanity and onward race, walk to heaven and He understands and sympathises with us. He knows the situations

you and I are in. As we realise His knowledge and care of and for us, it should be a comfort and encouragement. Now see:

## **2. Jesus As Our Perfecter.**

With human pioneers there was no guarantee they would be alive or all things be in place when the family arrived, or that the things he had prepared would be appreciated and sufficient for those coming after him. Thankfully with Jesus as our Pioneer this is totally different - all is guaranteed and underwritten by the awesomeness of who He is, not merely a man, but fully God too. His pioneering, authorship of faith begins in the rotten raw materials of our lives and natures as He works by grace, gives us new life by the working of the Holy Spirit and we are brought to faith. All this is by His working in us and we are enabled to go on as His people. It is He who encourages, watches over us, supports us, even carries us at times and gives us grace to go on as His child. Thankfully and remarkably, He ever lives to intercede for us and we are to realise we have this Great High Priest encouraging us and interceding for us now. It is not something He did, but He continues to do even today and He will be for ever doing this for us until He brings us safely home to heaven.

One day that glorious One will be the Perfecter, Finisher, the Completer of our faith. The work which His grace begun, is still continuing in us, will one day be complete, He will bring us safely to heaven, through many ups and downs, trials and dangers, joys and sorrows, stumbles and falls, times of rushing ahead and hanging back, sins and victories, despair and triumphs. One day He will say "*Time for you to come home!*" Whether we go through death's portal or it is when

He returns in blazing glory - we will then all be made perfect and our individual races will be over. One day all believers will be made perfect by the Perfecter as we read in 1 John 3:2 (ESV) *“Beloved, we are God’s children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when He appears we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him as He is.”* Jude 24-25 - *“To Him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before His glorious presence **without fault** and with great joy - to the only God our Saviour be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and for evermore! Amen.”*

The work of grace will be completed, be perfected, be finished in us and we will be able to stand before the throne of the universe, of all creation and look on the One who has done this and say *“The Son of God who loved me and gave Himself for me”* and we will be almost speechless with wonder, love and joy and yet praise will burst forth from our now sinless and unhindered souls and *“saints in an ecstasy gaze and hang on a crucified God”* [CH2:663v2 *Thou Shepherd of Israel, and mine*] and no other person, being, or sight will ever take our eyes off Him then. Here and now, we are to begin to practice fixing, turning our eyes on Jesus as we go on in the Christian life.

Then all our struggles, hurts, limping, half-hearted running, walking and going on for Him will be over. We will be in the place He has prepared for His people and His work of grace will be complete in us. At this moment look, consider this One, see the glory, see the honour ahead, joys better than any olive crown or gold-medal or anything the world can offer. What encouragements we have to run with perseverance,

endurance, patience the race set before us. It is worth going on and we are to look at, fix, turn our eyes on Jesus the Perfecter of our faith and see what awaits all who whose race is over. Yes, it may be hard at times in our lives - temptations to give into, to gratify our sinful desires, to have it easy, but keep looking at the Perfecter and all that is ours in Jesus. Now see:

### **3. Jesus As Our Pattern.**

The Lord Jesus knew, saw and considered the joy set before Him - that He would be the Saviour of His people, that He would be exalted, be sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. He saw the triumph of His love and grace in His people and the glory God would be given in and through such. Even though the cost of that was an agonising and hard way, He nevertheless endured the cross. This word “endured” (v2 & 3) is part of wordplay in the original - for in v1 we are called to be “enduring ones” - translated perseverance, patience, endurance and the verb is used in v2 & 3 to show Jesus did that on the cross. All the cross involved was endured, persevered, patiently stuck to by the Lord Jesus. What agonies, what sufferings did He endure? *“We may not know, we cannot tell what pains He had to bear; but we believe it was for us He hung and suffered there.”* We can only begin to scratch the surface in our understanding of what He truly and fully endured. Here He is said to have endured, put up with all the contradictions, hostility, opposition of sinners against Himself. The vile ones of earth treated Him as a nothing, a nobody, a thing to be railed at, mocked, beaten, spat at, crucified, executed and dumped out of life and yet He was far more than that as 1:2-3 tells us *“God ... in these last days He has spoken to us by His Son, whom He appointed heir of*

*all things, and through whom He made the universe. The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of His being, sustaining all things by His powerful word. After He had provided purification for sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven."*

This wonderful, this glorious One, this One who is the exact representation of God's being, endured all the agonies of the cross for us. He suffered and went through so much more than we ever could. Now the writer applies it with a BANG! This is the One we are to consider, to think on and ponder Him and all He did, is doing in our lives and will do for us. As we do so we will realise He is definitely worth loving and serving in both the good and the bad times. We are to keep on keeping on in the race set before us and these first three verses of chapter 12 will challenge us, rebuke us, encourage us and keep us running the race before us because we will be keeping our eyes fixed on our Jesus and we will consider Him in all His loveliness.