

Looking to Jesus During the Race of Life

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[0 : 0 0] Well, let me greet you again and say good morning. I also need to talk a little bit to make sure the sound folks, are we good to go? I speak loudly, sometimes I don't need a microphone, but we record these so we can upload them on our website.

Well, on August 7th, 1954, during the British Empire and Commonwealth Games, which was held in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada, England's Roger Bannister and Australian John Landy met for the first time in the one-mile run at the newly constructed Empire Stadium.

Both men had broken the four-minute barrier previously that same year. Bannister was the first in the world to break the mark with a time of three minutes, 59.4 seconds, and that was on May 6th in Oxford, England.

Subsequently, on June 21st, in Turku, Finland, Australian John Landy became the new record holder with an official time of three minutes, 57.9 seconds.

These two men, Bannister and Landy, were the only two sub-four-minute milers in the world at this time. Well, the world watched eagerly as both men approached the starting blocks for the one-mile run.

[1 : 2 6] As 35,000 enthusiastic fans looked on, no one would know what would take place on that historic day.

It was promoted as the mile of the century, and later it would be known as the miracle mile. So anybody remember that? Anybody that are enthusiasts watching track throughout the decades?

This is known as the miracle mile, the one-miler. Anybody? All right, this is good. I'll educate you on quite a few things here. Well, Bannister, England's Bannister.

So Bannister had strategized that he would relax during the third of the four laps that composed the one-mile run and would save everything for that finishing lap, for that finishing drive.

But as the runners entered the third lap, John Landy poured it on, stretching his already substantial lead. Well, Bannister, who was trailing in second position, immediately adjusted his strategy, increasing his pace, and started gaining on Landy.

[2 : 3 3] So during this third lap, the lead was cut in half. And then at the bell that signifies the start of the fourth and final lap, Bannister was only trailing Landy by six-tenths of a second.

Landy began running faster, however, and Bannister followed suit, feeling that he was going to lose if Landy did not slow down. Then, as they were rounding the final turn into the home stretch with only 90 yards to go, and with the crowd roaring in pitched excitement, and therefore Landy unable to hear his trailing opponent's footfalls, he, Landy, compulsively looked over his left shoulder to check the position of the trailing Bannister.

A fatal lapse of concentration considered by many. At that instant, as Landy was looking over his left shoulder, Bannister streaked by Landy on the outside, on the right, and on to victory.

In an autobiography published years later, Bannister commented that at that moment when Landy got distracted, looked over his left shoulder, Bannister commented, this tiny act of his, of Landy's, held great significance and gave me confidence.

All right, so that moment has actually been captured on film, 1954, it was recorded, and so what I did was I jumped on YouTube and I found this race, because I wanted to see that moment, right, when Landy's looking over his left shoulder.

[4 : 05] So Josiah, I've got two photos. So the first one is, this is a screen capture of the YouTube video, you can go online and watch this, but this is the moment where you see Landy on the inside looking over his left shoulder as Bannister at that moment, then goes to pass him on the outside.

Now that particular picture, there's, you see the cameraman over on the outside of the track. Well, there was a cameraman that also took opportunity at that moment to take a photograph.

This photograph, in later interviews, he said that it was more important for him, he thought he would capture action and intrigue on the final turn versus on the finish line.

So he was positioned along with other colleagues there. So this is the picture that he took, it's been colorized, it's been modernized, and this is actually a print that you can order today for those of you who are track enthusiasts.

But this is from the other angle, the outside angle, showing Landy looking over his shoulder in that brief, ever so brief break in concentration that gave Bannister the opportunity to pass him and go to victory.

[5 : 12] Landy's laps, his laps in concentration, he has taken his eyes off of what he should have been focused on, serves as an excellent illustration on one of the points that we'll be learning this morning as we read the first few verses of Hebrews chapter 12.

So, with that in mind, grab your Bibles, and for those of you who maybe don't have Bibles with you, either in the rush to get out the door or for whatever reason, no, we do, our church, we make Bibles available to you if you need them.

There's a few Bibles on the back table, and we also have copies of God's Word out on the greeting table as well. So feel free, if you need to grab a Bible, our guests, you may or may not have one, feel free to grab one.

They're actually yours to keep if you don't have a Bible, right? We want God's Word into everyone's hands. And so feel free to get up and grab a Bible, but do turn to Hebrews chapter 12.

Now, I like to, as we're turning to Hebrews 12, so for those of you who may not be as familiar with the books of the Bible or the order of the books, one trick that I've learned as far as looking for particular books in the New Testament is all the epistles that start with the letter T, they're all grouped together in the New Testament, right?

[6 : 29] 1st and 2nd Thessalonians, 1st and 2nd Timothy, and Titus. So Hebrews is after the T's. So find one of the T's, then turn past it. There's a really short book, Philemon, or Philemon, depending on how you pronounce it.

It's one chapter, 25 verses. It's short. And then you'll arrive at Hebrews. So maybe that'll help you in your next Bible drill, right? If you're looking for a book in the New Testament, look for the T's, and then you'll know whether it'll go right or left, but turn to Hebrews and go ahead to chapter 12.

I'm going to read, we're going to, this morning we're going to be in only three verses. I joked with Jeff this week that, you know, my goal was to do all 11 verses, well, the first 11 verses in Hebrews, and I joked with my wife, and they both looked at me like, the folks aren't going to sit all day Sunday listening to you preach.

And so we're going to focus in on the first three verses. I'm sure the Lord will give opportunity later this year as Jeff finishes up his graduate studies and has to go defend his thesis in California later this spring that you may see me back up here and we may pick up where we leave off today.

But let me read Hebrews 12, first three chapters, I'm sorry, first three verses, first three verses. Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and sin which clings so closely, and let us run the race with endurance, the race that, or let us run with endurance the race that is set before us.

[8 : 11] Verse 2, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or faint hearted. Let's pray again.

Let's pray. Let's pause and we'll pray. So, Father, we do want to just pause and thank you, Lord. Your servant David in the Psalms, he describes your word as perfect and sure and right and pure and true, that your word is to be more desired than gold, even much fine gold, and that in keeping your word, there is great reward.

So, Lord, as we open up your word this morning to read it and study it and to learn from it, I pray that you would give us a hunger and thirst for instruction. Father, open our eyes and direct our minds and transform our hearts.

Encourage us in our time together as we look at your truth. In Christ's name, amen. Amen. Well, the title of my sermon this morning is Looking to Jesus During the Race of Life.

[9 : 34] Looking to Jesus During the Race of Life. Hebrews 12, if you're a student of God's word, Hebrews 12 is probably a familiar passage to you.

And so, I have nothing necessarily new to say, a new angle that I just discovered this past week or two when studying. My goal this morning is just to share with you, just from my recent studies, how I've been just so encouraged in the truth of these verses and doing a little bit of digging into some of the context and some of the Greek usage of these words.

And so, this is really less of a sermon, if you would, and just more with me sharing with you my gleanings from these verses as we look to run the race that is set before us.

Now, because we are jumping into chapter 12 and we don't, you know, we're not doing a verse by verse through here, that's what Jeff's doing. Again, for our guests, we're walking through 1 Peter.

So, this is sort of a one-off, if you would. So, it's important that I give you a little bit of context, right, in case you aren't familiar with the book of Hebrews, the epistle of Hebrews.

[10 : 45] This letter bears the traditional Greek title to the Hebrews, right? So, we know that this epistle is addressed to the community of Hebrews or Jews, and it's estimated to be written before A.D. 70, probably in the late A.D. 60s.

Unlike other New Testament epistles, there's no strong evidence to point to the identity of the author. So, we can't refer to Paul. We can't refer to Peter as the author of this book.

Bible scholars have researched, there have been names proposed, but there's no conclusive evidence or no agreement as to a single author. But needless to say, because the epistle to the Hebrews is in the canon of Scripture, we know what does 2 Timothy 3.16 tell us, that all Scripture is God-breathed, though the ultimate author is God, the Holy Spirit, right?

So, this community of believers was facing a very real possibility of intensified persecution. This book, in some ways, I think, is similar to the epistle to the Galatians from Paul.

The recipients of this had turned away from the legalism of Judaism, right, to the freedom that's in Christ. And then the persecution starts to hit.

[12 : 02] They're starting to realize the cost of following Jesus. And so, there was a very real temptation, a very real possibility of them confronting this persecution, tempting to then just remove any association or any identification that they had with Jesus and go back to what they knew, right?

That's sort of common human behavior, right? You step into a new context and then things get uncomfortable or you start feeling persecuted or things just aren't going the way you think.

And so, what do you do? It's just natural human tendency to retreat back to what you know, even though it may not be for your best. And so, the author of Hebrews sees this.

And so, as we read through Hebrews, if we were to go through the letter to the Hebrews, we would see that the author contrasts the imperfect and incomplete provisions of the Old Covenant, right, given under Moses, with the infinitely better provisions of the New Covenant, offered by the perfect High Priest, God's only Son and Messiah, Jesus Christ.

And in providing these contrasts, right, the imperfect, incomplete Old Covenant with the infinitely better through Jesus Christ's New Covenant, in doing those, in providing those contrasts, the author, as if we were to read through Hebrews, the author encourages, exhorts, and he even admonishes his readers to continue fighting the good fight, to stay in the race, as we've read this morning, just in these first verses in chapter 12, to keep their eyes on Jesus, to remain focused and disciplined, and to persevere.

[13 : 53] So, as we spend the rest of our time together looking at these three verses, keep that context in mind, right? These recipients are in this sort of situation, and the author is reaching out to the Jews, those who either genuinely believe Christ or are following Him.

And there's also some debate with scholars if this letter was also not intended, at least in part, to those who were maybe enamored with Christ, maybe in their mind had resolved in some part to follow Christ, but had not been genuinely saved.

A genuine faith, and it put their whole life and commitment into Christ. And that's where it depends, you know, that's part of a larger discussion for later, but based on who these recipients are, is whether we interpret this letter correctly.

So, as genuine believers, right, the author is addressing you, don't give up, run the race, keep the faith. And that's what we see in chapter 12.

So, let me reread these three verses, and what I'd like to do today is take these three verses and take some of the phrases apart and just unpack them a little bit. Then we're going to pack them up together.

[15 : 04] And I hope that when we're done, that when you walk out this door, that you will feel more equipped, more, not necessarily informed. We're not doing this just knowledge for knowledge's sake, but that you're more equipped to run a better race for Jesus Christ.

So, let me read these three verses again. So, therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

Consider Him who endured from sinners such hostility against Himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted. So, any student of the Bible, when you come across, you tell me, when you come across the word therefore, what do you do?

Why is therefore? What's it there for? And so, we would be remiss if we don't understand what the therefore is about. And that's part of the reason why I asked Jeff earlier this week if he would read chapter 11 for our call to worship.

It's a long section of Scripture, but it's one that is so important to understand the context of this, this therefore. And the author, this therefore is a transition for two main points.

[16 : 39] The second one being what we read about in Hebrews 11, right? The witnesses of the lives of the heroes of the faith. But, if we turn back to chapter 10, I'm going to ask you, if you would, to turn back just a page probably in your Bible or two, to chapter 10, this therefore is also concluding the broader thought of the superiority of Christ's priestly ministry.

So, in chapter 10, back in verses 11 through 14, and then 18 through 25, I want to read that to you again as we understand this transition from chapters 10 and 11 into this final thought that we're looking at in chapter 12.

So, chapter 10, verse 11, the author writes, As every priest stands daily at his service, offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins.

But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, He sat down at the right hand of God, waiting from that time until His enemies should be made a footstool for His feet.

For a single offering He has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified. And jumping down to verse 18, where there is forgiveness of these, there is no longer any offering for sin.

[18 : 09] Therefore, brothers, verse 19, therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that He opened for us through the curtain, that is, through His flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.

Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful. And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another and all the more as you see the day drawing near.

So you see, as the author is transitioning, that therefore, He is therefore in view of what I have tried to persuade you with Christ's priestly ministry being superior to anything that has come before, right?

The whole Old Testament, the whole system of sacrifice, right? Every year, every time, we have to continually make sacrifices for atonement of our sins in the old system, but Christ has come, right?

That once and for all sacrifice, that perfect sacrifice. And so the author of Hebrews is, again, persuading, exhorting his reader that in light of that, why would you go back?

[19 : 44] Keep running the race. Keep going forward. Keep your eyes on Christ. And so that's what the therefore is there for, is finishing up that thought. So, moving on, I'm not going to do every word by word so you all can sit in peace.

I hope you're not too worried. But I do want to just, I do want to break apart these next, you know, the rest of verse one and verses two and three. So it's going to be a little bit different than maybe I've preached in the past.

I want to look at certain words and certain phrases and see how they modify one another. And I think we'll have a little bit better understanding, a little bit better appreciation of these verses.

So the rest of verse one, right? When we look at verse one and verses two and three, there are three, these three verses. When you look in Greek, there is one main thought in these three verses.

Well, is it that we have clouds of witnesses? Is it that we need to lay every side every weight? Is it that we need to look to Jesus? You know, what in those three verses is the main action, the main thought.

[20 : 54] And it is to run, run the race. And Josiah, I'm going to ask you if you could just go ahead and move forward. So, so in your notes, we only have one slide, but it'll be, it'll be progressively showing some words appear on the screen as I preach.

So when we look at verses one through three, everything is pointed toward running the race. That's the main action, the main verb in Greek.

It's a present tense verb. And if you remember any of our previous teaching, when we talk about Greek being present tense, it implies current action and continual action.

So when the author writes, run the race, let us run, it's not a one-time event that's over and done. We keep running, right? We keep running this race, just like in a track meet or in a marathon.

Scripture says that we run, let us run the race with endurance. So endurance indicates an active perseverance involving effort and struggle.

[21 : 56] And you all know that. You know what the word endurance means, right? A steady determination to keep going. And that's opposed to perhaps a passive patience, right?

So when you think about running with endurance, that's not a picnic in the park, right? When you're running with endurance, I used to run when I was in better shape and would run several miles.

My son, Josiah, was in track. I actually, I talked to him a little bit about sort of what does it mean to run endurance? When you're running around the track, running the 800 meter, what are you focused on?

And learn some interesting things that I'll share in just a moment. But when the author here talks about running with endurance, that means running intentionally with focus, with drive, not passive.

Not jogging and smelling the roses and doing what would be more lackadaisical. And if that's not enough, when he writes, let us run with endurance the race.

[22 : 57] So the word race in Greek is agnon. And we get the word agony, right? Agnon, agony, right?

So we get the word agony from that. So you can imagine, all right, this is not just a walk in the park sort of race, right? In other places in scripture, the same Greek word is translated fight, conflict, struggle, compete.

So again, it's not a passive luxury, but it's demanding, sometimes grueling and agonizing. It requires our utmost in self-discipline, determination, and perseverance to finish or to cross the finish line.

Let us run the race or let us run with endurance the race. So we run, we run with endurance, with persistence, with perseverance, the race.

Not easy. Those of you who have been Christians for any amount of time, I'm not telling you anything you don't already know, right? Being a believer, a follower of Jesus Christ, or standing for your convictions in the face of opposition, in the face of the world and the culture that is striving to knock you down and to break you apart, you know that running the race for Christ is not easy.

[24 : 20] It's a fight. It's a struggle. It's not passive. But then the author says, continues there at the end of verse 1, So it's not a coincidence that we happen to have this race before us.

It's not that you stumbled into this race, into a marathon or into a track meet, right? God in His sovereignty before the foundations of the world set the race that you're in right before you.

Does that give you confidence or does that concern you? Does that stress you a little bit, right? It should give you confidence. It should give you peace because we trust the Lord.

We trust that God knows what He's doing. He's sovereign. Again, before the foundations of the world, He knew the race that you would be running. He knows what you're going through. And the author of Hebrews is saying, my brothers and sisters, don't quit.

Continue. Yes, it's hard. Run with endurance. The race, the agony that is set before you. God set it before you. It's okay.

[25 : 36] You can do this. The strong exhortation from the author, this last half of verse 1. Let us run the race with endurance that is set before us. So, in your notes, and as you sort of, what do you take away from the sermon this morning?

This first part, think run. All right, you got that? Let's all say it together. Run, right? Run, run. Now, the earlier phrases in verse 1 are participles.

Participles are like sort of verbs that are treated as adjectives and sort of modify the main verb. For those of you English teachers that are here, hopefully I get a check mark for that one, right? So, there are other parts of the sentence that focus on and modify the main verb, the main action.

And so, let's back up in verse 1 and let's read that. So, after the therefore, the author writes, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses.

And so, the word here I want you to remember is, and Josiah, if you could advance it, remember. All right? So, as you're running this race with endurance, the author of Hebrews is encouraging us to remember.

[26 : 53] Well, to remember what? Or to be wary of what? Well, this great cloud of witnesses. Now, there's two ways. If I were to sort of take a poll and ask you, so what does that mean?

What's the implication of having so great a cloud of witnesses? There's generally two views as to what the author is intending there. Perhaps the one that's more common, though I'm going to actually talk about the second one, but perhaps more common is the view that there's witnesses from heaven and they're watching the lives of present believers, right?

So, there's this cloud of witnesses that's up in heaven right now looking down on us. They're like spectators. They're cheering us on. All right? So, that is a common understanding.

If you were to sort of read it, I can see I probably at one time sort of interpreted that that was the case, right? And it's possible, even in the context of these verses, that that would be somewhat of a defensible interpretation of that.

However, and I'll explain why, I believe that the context, the overall context of not just these few verses, but the verses preceding and the verses following, that it favors the meaning that these cloud of witnesses, that their lives have borne witness to their faithful race.

[28 : 23] Okay? That is, these cloud of witnesses are witnesses, their lives are witnesses to God of their faithful life. And that's, again, why I wanted us to spend some time in the call to worship going through these heroes of the faith in chapter 11.

And we read, those of you going through our Bible reading plan, you finished Genesis. And so, hopefully, some of that was a little bit of a reminder. But seeing what the heroes of the faith in Genesis, what their lives went through, what struggles and challenges they had before them.

And so, when we think about these great clouds of witnesses, the author's focus here is on the importance of current believers learning from those who have gone before, not on those who have gone watching us.

See the difference there? When we read these verses, let's not so much think about how much we are blessing those faithful ones that have gone before us. They're now watching us, cheering us on.

Perhaps. But it's better to think, as you run your race, you need to be thinking about those who have gone before us and about their faithful life.

[29 : 39] It is what we see in them, not what they see in us, that is the writer's main point about that phrase and him highlighting that we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses.

Let me try to take it another way if I haven't been clear. So, by extension of this thought that there have been those who have gone before us, as documented in Scripture, who have lived faithful lives for Jesus, for the promise that was to come in case of Old Testament.

So, by extension, let me ask you, do you have someone in your life, perhaps someone who has passed away, a grandfather or an aunt or an uncle, or someone that you consider has lived a faithful life, someone that you maybe have looked up to, or when you think about their life, has been an encouragement in your current race?

Someone whose life was run well by faith for Jesus. Not a perfect life, right? But a life characterized by faithfulness as they endured challenges and struggles.

For me, and my wife knows this, right? For me, there have been a couple of folks that, as I think back in my life, that I think is a hero of the faith that has been in my family.

[31 : 09] My aunt, Ann Shipley, she was an aunt that lived in Tennessee. My aunt and uncle, Ann and Bill, were those who I was so close to. They're the ones who brought me to church.

They're the ones who, my aunt, well, she was a farm girl, and she didn't stop. She was on the move. She could run circles around me, you know, her whole life, even though she was much older than I was.

But she lived a life of faith and a life of service. She endured many challenges, many struggles. But she passed away, it'll be two years this past June.

And her husband, my uncle, Uncle Bill, also passed away the following month. So when I run my race, I think of them. I think of my brother-in-law, Tim Davey, and my father-in-law, Conrado Caldejan.

It's this month, nine years ago, right? They both passed away, just days within, of each other. Their lives bore witness to their faith.

[32 : 14] And that encourages me. And so the Hebrew writer is saying, Christian, as you're running the race with endurance, that's set before you, remember those cloud of witnesses, not that they're cheering you on, but that their lives give witness, give testimony, that they have run a faithful life for the Lord.

And that should be an encouragement to you. So what about you? Do you have someone in your life that has encouragement? If not, there's great heroes of the faith, right?

The author mentioned many of them all throughout the Old Testament, the author in chapter 11, but throughout all of Scripture. For those of you who love reading autobiographies and biographies of other giants in the faith from the past, you know, centuries, you can find, if you don't know of anyone outside of Scripture, you can read about some giants of the faith who, they sacrificed everything, right?

They sacrificed everything for Jesus. And that should be an encouragement, Christian, for each of us. Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let them be an encouragement to us, their life of faith.

Well, the next phrase that the author says is, let us also lay aside every weight and sin which clings so closely. So the next word, so run, remember, and the next one is a fancy word, divest.

[33 : 51] I couldn't think of a better word, but divest, get rid of. You know, Scripture says, you know, put aside, lay aside. The New American Standard says lay aside.

The NIV says throw off. All those verbs are synonymous, right? It's the concept of throwing off, laying aside to rid yourselves of something in order to run a good race.

So we read here that there's two categories of items that the author wants us to lay aside, right, to get rid of. And the first thing are those things that hinder you, those things that are considered maybe encumbrances, right?

Anything that impedes you, hinders you from your progress as a runner. In the first century A.D., runners ran in the stadium virtually naked.

And I think that probably hadn't changed too much. Today, if you watch sporting events. So they would walk into the stadium wearing long, flowing, colorful robes. And at the start of the race, they would take these robes and they would lay them aside.

[35 : 01] They would throw them off, so to speak, in order to run a fast, efficient race. So in like manner, the author is exhorting believers to discard anything that would encumber them or hinder them from running the race.

We'll revisit that in just a moment. Let's look at the second thing that we are to lay off, right? It says, So let us also lay aside every weight and sin which clings so closely.

That should be no surprise to us, Christians, right? We ought to be daily laying off and getting rid of sin, right? Living a holy life. Not to earn God's favor, right?

It's to express our gratitude and appreciation for what He has given us. His Son, salvation, eternal life through Jesus Christ's blood, right?

Don't get that backward. This is not a salvation by works. It's salvation by faith. But we are to strive, run the race, live holy lives, not to earn, but to worship, to express gratitude to Jesus.

[36 : 07] So the words here, sin which clings so closely. Again, I looked at the, I read from the English Standard Version, but I do sort of take a peek at what the New American Standard Version says and other versions.

You know, the concept that sin clings closely, New American Standard says it so easily entangles. That word picture, you know, I resonate with that one.

Sin easily entangles. And I think NIV says the same thing, right? So the sense here is that there's something that would figuratively wind around our body and would hinder or bind movement.

Isn't that a good picture of sin? When you think about sin, it seems fun and enjoyable at the moment. But you know what it's doing? It's wrapping around you. It's wrapping around your heart.

It's figuratively wrapping around your arms, around your legs, around your body. And then you become enslaved to sin if it's not addressed, if it's not thrown off.

[37 : 13] And it hinders you in your race. The issue is not necessarily what it is, but it's what it does to you, right?

It keeps you from running well. It dishonors your Savior, Jesus Christ. It robs Him of His glory. Turn to Galatians chapter 3 for me, if you would.

So Galatians, that's before the books that start with T, all right? So you have to turn before that, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians. So if you turn back to Galatians, I mentioned earlier that Galatians in some ways is similar to Hebrews in that the recipients are in this sort of phase where do they run the race or do they fall back into the law, right?

So Galatians chapter 3, let me read verses 1 through 9 of chapter 3. And listen how the Apostle Paul, he puts the smackdown on the Galatians here, right?

This is one where he's admonishing them to run the good race. Paul writes, and again, Galatians 3 verses 1 through 9. O foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you?

[38 : 27] It was before your eyes that Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified. Let me ask you only this. Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law or by hearing with faith?

Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh? Did you suffer so many things in vain, if indeed it was in vain?

Does he who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you do so by works of the law or by hearing with faith?

Just as Abraham believed God and it was counted to him as righteousness. Know then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham.

And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, In you shall all the nations be blessed.

[39 : 30] So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith. And then, chapter 4, verse 9, By now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how can you turn back again to the weak and worthless elementary principles of the world, whose slaves you want to be once more?

Wow! Your Apostle Paul was doing a smackdown, right? On the Galatians. He was out of love, though, right? He's exhorting them, Don't turn aside to what you formerly knew, because you're so much further ahead.

You've made progress. You've been saved by faith. Keep living in faith. And so, as we talk about this laying off of every weight that hinders you and sin, which clings so closely, So let me ask you, Is that what you really want to do?

Do you want to keep hanging on to those things that encumber you, that hinder you from your race for your Lord and Savior Jesus? Right? Are you enjoying sin that much, that you're willing to give up everything for sin?

What is it in your life that hinders you from living a life of faith, or living a greater life of faith? What encumbrances do you have in your life?

[41 : 02] Obstacles? Sins? Have you heard the phrase, Pick the best from among all the good? The encumbrances, right? The weights that weigh you down, don't necessarily have to be sins, right?

Sometimes we have to pick the best from the good. There's nothing wrong with exercising. There's nothing wrong with fellowshiping with one another. There's nothing wrong with pursuing hobbies and interests.

But when it becomes an entanglement in living your life of faith, then that's where you need to put it off. The writer here says, Get rid of it.

Lay it aside. Why? So you can live a life of faith. Run with endurance the race that is set before you. Are there specific sins that have you entangled and therefore tripping you up or causing you to stumble?

Hey, you may have a blind spot. You need to ask a loved one or someone who you trust. Ask him or her, Hey, are there some sins in my life that I don't see, that you see and you have been afraid to tell me because I might get mad at you?

[42 : 16] You should ask that and get ready to hear the answer because that answer is going to be out of love.

Right? If you do, if you have specific sins, either those that you know about or those that you may learn shortly or soon enough, it's time to address those today so that you can run freely the race that God has set before you.

Make today the day of confession, of forgiveness, and of restoration. Don't wait. Don't wait. The author says, Lay it aside.

Lay aside these encumbrances and these sins. So do that. That's part of your homework for later today. All right. So you see how so far these other actions and verbs and phrases are really modifying and focusing on this main thought in these verses to run with endurance the race.

So remember, be encouraged by those who have gone before us who have lived a life of faith. Divest. Get rid of those encumbrances. Be active. Be intentional. Getting rid of those hindrances, those encumbrances, those things that cling so easily to sins so that you can run the race.

[43 : 38] All right. Verse 2. That was all verse 1. That's why we're only doing three verses this morning. So verse 1. So verse 2. All right. We'll move on. Look to Jesus. And so I think the next part is focus.

Right. So as you're running this race, focus on Jesus. Right. The writer says, looking to Jesus, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

I asked Josiah, Josiah, when you're running the 800 meter, what are you focused on? I'm curious. Are you watching the crowds? Are you watching, are you looking for mom and dad, cheering you on, seeing where we are?

Are you watching the coach? And Josiah said, you know what, Josiah, this is, what he focuses is on his form. Right. He wants to make sure to make, to run the best and fastest race that he can.

He's making sure that his head's right, his shoulders right, his stride's right. He's not looking at his feet. He's not looking at the crowd. That he's focused, in his case, on his form, because that will give him the greatest return on that investment of where his focus is.

[44 : 49] Now, this is where the analogy breaks down. I'm not saying you should be watching yourself. Okay. The focus is not on you. In this case, it's focusing on what you need to focus on in the race of life.

And this is where, according to the, to the writer here, the focus is on Jesus. The example that I gave during the first part of the sermon, right? Don't be Lundy.

Don't be focusing on other things, even as compulsive or as impulsive as it might be, to check what's around you, to compare, well, you know, I'm, I'm living a pretty good life compared to my, you know, my neighbor across the street.

I'm glad I'm not like him. No, no, no, no. Focus on Christ, right? He's your example. Um, so looking to Jesus. So that phrase, looking to Jesus indicates focused attention in the sense of to look away from everything else and to focus on one object.

And that's him, right? So when, when, when the writer writes looking to Jesus, it means stop looking at everything else. Stop looking at the distractions, focus on Jesus, right?

[45 : 56] There's also, you know, this particular looking to Jesus is also that same Greek present tense. It's not a one and done. You don't look to Jesus once and you're good to go. You got your, got your book stamped.

You keep, look to Jesus, keep looking to Jesus, do it and keep doing it. It's continual. Now notice what the writer, who, who the writer says not to look to. All right.

Who does the writer say not to look to? Let's go back to verse one, right? Does, does, does the writer say looking, at the cloud of witnesses that went before you?

No, no. You know, this does not say to continually looking at the heroes of the faith mentioned in chapter 11, right? We are not to model our lives after them.

We're to model our lives after who? Jesus. Right. That's an important point, right? I asked you earlier, do you have in your life, those who you consider heroes of the faith?

[46 : 57] Maybe those who have passed away have gone before you. I shared with you my brother-in-law and my father-in-law and my aunt and uncle. Am I to model my life after theirs? No, no.

Now, I certainly want to emulate godly qualities of their life without a doubt. I learned from them. I learned from them. I want, I think of my father-in-law. I want his servant's heart.

Right? But scripture says, Greg, you model your life after Jesus. You focus, you look to Jesus in the race of life. All right?

So, for those of you who like reading or writing your Bible, this is a great time to circle that, looking to Jesus. And you can put in there, nothing else. No one else.

Right? Focus on Jesus. Be intentional. Well, why do we focus on Jesus? Well, the writer says here, he's the founder and perfecter of our faith. Is that any surprise?

[47 : 54] You know that, right? Jesus is the founder and perfecter of our faith. How is he the founder? Well, Hebrews 10, you don't have to turn there, but if you were to turn back to Hebrews 10, I'm sorry, Hebrews chapter 2, verse 10, the same writer writes, for it was fitting that he, God, for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory, should make the founder of their salvation, Jesus, perfect through suffering.

So, scripture gives testimony to the fact that Jesus is the founder of faith. Not only is he founder, but he's the perfecter, right? Perfecter.

He's the originator of faith, and then he's the model of faith, again, that we are to follow. Perfecter means to carry it through to completion, one who brings something to a successful conclusion.

You know, in life, I don't know about you, you probably observe this too in life, but typically, any sort of process, or any sort of engagement with authorities, or with services, or companies, or whatnot, you usually have, like with a service provider, like, this is very close to me, because we just had a water leak in our house, our washing machine leaked, and so we called to report it, and so the first team that came out was the mitigation team, right?

And then when they're done, then another team, the remediation team, comes in. And so, whether it be that, whether, if you go to the doctor's, you know, you go to a doctor appointment, you have the front office, it checks you in, does all the paperwork, then they hand you off to the actual doctor, or nurse practitioner, or whomever.

[49 : 42] It just seems in life, there's always sort of a front end person, and then you're handed off to one or more other services, right? And so, this is not this way with Jesus, right?

He is the originator, he's in the front, he provided our faith, and then he modeled perfect faith, he perfected our faith to the end, and how did he perfect it? He died, he lived a perfect life, he died on the cross, and then he defeated the grave, by being resurrected.

Complete faith, womb to tomb, right? Beginning to end, and that is Jesus. I think about, for those of you, I think this is maybe the 1990s, or 1980s, are you familiar with the commercial, by a company called BASF?

Chemical Company, BASF? Here was their tagline, and all their commercials, and all their marketing. We don't make the products you buy, we make the products you buy, better, right?

I have some people that are nodding, I don't know. Some of you, I just lost, because you're too young, but if you're, or you don't watch TV, which is great. But, yeah, that commercial was from the 90s, maybe the 80s, but, but, but Jesus does both, right?

[50 : 54] He, he makes our faith, and then he makes our faith perfect. He makes our faith perfect. He trusted God, as evidenced by his total obedience, to the Father, and the work of atonement.

Jesus trusted, his trust was, was, was displayed by obedience, and that trust and obedience, is what we saw, is a faithful life, right?

Christ was all about, obey his Father, right? And bring glory to him. Christ, living a faithful life. So, looking to Jesus, the founder, the founder, and the perfecter of our faith, and the next phrase, right?

Who, for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of God. So, now we, we get to hear a little bit more, and learn a little bit more, about who this Jesus is, right?

That we're supposed to be, and we should be, focused on, right? The joy that, so what, what is this, who, for the joy that was set before him? The joy that was set before him.

[52 : 02] What was that joy? The joy of exaltation, and sitting at the right hand, of the throne of God. In the high priestly prayer, that we read in John 17, Jesus prays to his Father, he says, I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work, that you gave me to do.

And now, Father, glorify me, in your own presence, with the glory, that I had with you, before the world, existed.

So, as Jesus is approaching, his completion, of his work, on earth, he's looking beyond the cross now, right? And he's asking to be returned, to that glory, from which he came, where he shared with God the Father, before the world began.

That was the joy, that was set before him. Look into Jesus, the founder and perfecter, of our faith, who, for the joy, that was set before him.

As Christians, what is the joy, that's set before you?

[53 : 14] What motivates you, to run the race? The prize, that Christians, are to run for, is not heaven. What, Greg?

Wait a minute. Jeff, pull Greg off quick. He just said something, I don't agree with, right? As Christians, we're not to run, for heaven. Why? As Christians, we already have heaven, right?

If you're a genuine, born again believer, you have heaven. You have been guaranteed, eternal life. Our race, is not a race, for heaven. Our race, that joy, that's set before us, is the exact same joy, that was set before Christ, and that was to exalt, our Lord.

Right? That should be the joy, that should be the motivation, as we look to Jesus, is to run, toward that joy, that's set before us, just like Jesus. Right? The joy of exaltation, that God promises, will be ours, if we glorify Him, on earth, as His Son did.

Romans 8, 16, and 17, and just for, just for lack of time, let me read that to you, but noted in your notes, Romans 8, 16, and 17, the Spirit Himself, bears witness, with our spirit, that we are children of God, and of children, then heirs, heirs of God, and fellow heirs, with Christ, provided we suffer with Him, listen close, in order that we, may also be glorified, with Him.

[54 : 41] We're going to be glorified, with Jesus Christ. That's the joy, that is set before us, and that's the joy, according to the Hebrews writer here, the joy that's set before, Jesus Christ.

And that, is what he had in view, as he, endured the cross, and despised, the shame. So Greg, what's that mean? What's it mean to endure the cross?

I think that's pretty, there's not much to unpack there, right? Jesus Christ, endured the cross. The gruesome, and painful suffering, on the cross, shows us, that Jesus is both, back to the earlier point, that Jesus is the founder, and the perfecter, of faith, right?

Jesus endured, to the end. So Jesus, joy set before Him, He endured the cross, and He despised, despised the shame.

So Greg, what does despising, the shame mean? What is the author's, original intent, when he wrote that? So, the word despise, I think we probably, have a general understanding, right?

[55 : 45] When you despise something, you sort of dislike it, a lot, right? Hate may even be, an appropriate synonym there. So in English, right, a strong dislike, a strong disdain.

But in the Greek, this particular word, it's ever so slightly different, not a lot, but slightly different, in that the nuance here, is to think little of, or to think nothing of.

So Greg, does that mean, Jesus didn't even think about the cross? No, that's not what, that's not what the writer here is saying. He just, Christ didn't give it, preeminent thought in His mind, about the cross.

He was looking beyond the cross, right? To the joy set before Him. I found an article that John Piper wrote, in March of 2013, about this phrase, despising the shame.

And I want to read this to you, it's very brief, and then we'll wrap up. But man, this spoke to me, I was in tears actually, after reading this. So this is what he wrote in an article, regarding the phrase, despising the shame.

[56 : 50] John Piper writes, well it means Jesus spoke to shame, like this. Listen to me, shame. Do you see that joy in front of me? Compared to that, you are less than nothing.

You are not worth comparing to that. I despise you. You think you have power? Compare to the joy before me. You have nothing, shame.

Joy, joy, that is my power. Not you, shame. You are worthless. You are powerless. You think you can distract me? I won't even look at you.

I have a joy set before me. Why would I look at you? Shame, you are ugly and despicable, and you are almost finished. You cover me now, as with a shroud.

Before you can say, so there, I will throw you off like a filthy rag, and I will put on my royal robe. You think you are great, because even last night, you made my disciples run away.

[57 : 50] You are a fool, shame. You are a despicable fool. That abandonment, that loneliness, this cross, these tools of yours, they are all my sacred suffering, and will save my disciples, not destroy them.

You are a fool. Your filthy hands fulfill holy prophecy. Farewell, shame. It is finished. Isn't that good? That's what Jesus, so John Piper, I think, just captured in that, this is what that means, when the writer says, Christ, Jesus Christ, despised the shame.

He didn't, it's not that he didn't think anything of it, but he was looking beyond. I'm not going to even give you my, you're not worth my attention about. I'm moving on, to the glory, to the joy, that's set before me.

I just thought that was, that was just fantastic. The rest of verse two, right, seated at the right hand, the throne of God, again, that's part of the glory, right, God the Father invited, God the Son, back up to sit with him, as Christ, Jesus Christ the Son, ascended, to sit there, at the place of honor, in the heavenly throne room.

So, verse three, let me hit that real quick, and then again, we'll wrap up. So, look at verse three. If you, if you read the ESV, verse three is in a new section, but if you read other translations, NESB, NIV, I think New King James, verse three is actually a continuing thought, with verses one and two.

[59 : 15] So, I've chosen to go ahead, and keep that together. So, verse three, and again, this is just to encourage us, as we run. Verse three says, consider him who endured from sinners, such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary, and faint hearted.

Right? So, again, it's sort of a re-emphasis, and Josiah, I think we got one more. Right? So, consider. Consider Jesus. This is what verse three is telling us. So, consider him.

Right? Consider conveys the idea, of a process of serious thinking, where a matter is weighed, with the utmost care, through comparison, reflection, and conclusion. What the word here, consider him, means, this is not a fleeting thought.

You know, just in passing, consider Jesus, who suffered, the hands of sinners. It's more than that. It's as you run the race, consider Jesus. Consider what he did.

Know your Lord. Just like we do remember, the cloud of witnesses, the faithful ones, who went before us, consider what Jesus did. Don't let, he came, live a perfect life, down on the cross, and rose again.

[60 : 26] That can be very cliché-ish, in your mind. Don't do that. Contemplate, what Jesus did. He endured from sinners, such hostility, toward himself.

Why do we do that? So that we may not grow weary, or faint-hearted, when we run the race. I think, in some of the other translations, is faint-hearted, or lose heart.

And again, now we've come full circle, with this is what the author, is exhorting, the believing Hebrews, the believing Jews, is don't lose heart. Consider Jesus, so you may not grow weary.

So those are some of the thoughts, that I had when I studied this. On the surface, we could have, there was a, Josiah, can you go to the, we're done with the slides, can you go to the song, that we sang, in the two song set, the first song, next to last slide.

So I'm challenging you here. I'm calling it audible, because I just want to, Jeff, Jeff, you recognize this, so all the time, and I recognized it, when we were singing today. Yeah, when I am weary, so this verse, we didn't even coordinate, I had no idea, what we were singing this morning.

[61 : 36] When I am weary with the cost, I see the triumph of the cross, so in its shadow, what will I do? I shall run. That's what the Hebrew writer's telling us, run with endurance, a race that's set before us.

You all sang that, you sang my sermon, you just didn't know it, before we started. Let's pray. So Father, we thank you Lord, for your word. We thank you, that we read words like this, from writers from long ago, through the Holy Spirit, that encourage us, that exhort us, to keep the main thing, the main thing Lord.

Help us, in the ordinariness, of our lives, of the ruts, that we may get in. Oh Father, would you refresh our spirit, would you renew our heart, and may we do that Father, as we look to you Lord, may we see you, not just as a concept, or as an idea, but Father, would you, as we look, and focus on you, would you, would you help us, to see you, as you really are, a loving, kind, holy, Savior, you're our Messiah, you have saved us, from the wrath, of your Father, by taking on, our sins, forever, in the past, and in the future Lord.

Thank you Father, for saving me, such a sinner as me, thank you, for your grace, and your mercy, Father help me, to be faithful, in my living, my running the race, that's set before me, help me, help us all Father, to live, to run a race, of endurance, looking to you Lord, Lord, I pray for this church family, I pray for our guests, who are here this morning Lord, when we leave these doors, here in a few minutes, Father would you, help each of us Lord, to focus on you, to not be distracted, by the world, to not even be distracted, of good things, but Father may we be focused, on the best, and that's you, thank you Lord, for your word, in Christ's name, amen.