

## INTRODUCTION

Are you in the Christmas spirit? Years ago Perry Como sang a song that said, "It's beginning to look a lot like Christmas. Everywhere you go. Take a look in the five and ten glistening once again." Remember what a five and ten was? Things used to cost five and ten cents—and now we have dollar stores. "It's beginning to look a lot like Christmas; Toys in every store." Actually, if you're looking for the hottest toy, fingerlings for \$15, the shelves are empty because a bunch of greedy people used computer bots to buy them all out so they could sell them to you for ridiculous prices. Well, that's Christmas 2017 for you.

We're going to the wonderful book of Hebrews today and we are going to fix our eyes on Jesus. After all, the whole reason we have Christmas is to celebrate that Jesus came into our world. So although you may be in the middle of Christmas preparations, I want to invite you to spend the next half-hour focusing on the Jesus, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

Two weeks ago we came to the pinnacle of Hebrews. After spending months talking about faith and members of God's faith hall of fame in Hebrews 11, we moved into Hebrews 12 where we are pictured as running the race of our lives. In that lesson, the main focus was on how to run the race. As we study the same passage again and add a couple of new verses I want us to focus on how to relate to Jesus as we run the race that is set out for us.

Hebrews 11:40. "God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect."

Hebrews 12:1-4. "Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart. In your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood."

In the last message we talked about how we need to listen to the encouragement of those who surround us. These are the faithful who have already finished their race. I said that it's not a picture of us running in a circle in a stadium; instead it's a cross-country race and they are lining the way cheering us on. And we need to get rid of the sin in our lives that keeps tripping us up. And we must pace ourselves for the ultra-marathon of the race God has marked out for us. The Christian life isn't a sprint; it's an endurance race.

In Aesop's fable, *The Tortoise and the Hare*, "The rabbit challenged all the animals to a race and the tortoise accepted. The hare took off and ran circles around the tortoise that kept plodding along. The hare was so confident that he would win, he took a nap. When he woke up, he saw the tortoise crossing the finish line. The moral of that story and the message for the Christian life is that slow and steady always beats fast and furious—regardless of what Vin Diesel says!

We ended by talking about the finish line. And the finish line isn't death or heaven. The finish line is Jesus. And in Hebrews 12:3 we are commanded to "consider Him who endured such opposition." So in this message, I invite you to consider Jesus. Let's consider who Jesus is. Let's consider what Jesus did. And let's consider how we must respond to who He is and what He did.

## **I. CONSIDER WHO JESUS IS.**

Before we consider Jesus, I want to call your attention to the word "consider" in verse three. It's important because it's the only time this word appears in the New Testament. We get our words analogy and analog from this word. An analog clock is different from a digital clock because it has moving hands that rotate around the face of the clock. It depends of moving parts that are coordinated. The minute hand moves faster than the hour hand, but they are closely connected. An analogy is when two different things are compared because they are almost alike. I'm using as analogy when I say, "Those dinner rolls were as hard as a rock." Or I could say, "Those dinner rolls were as light as a feather." I'm comparing one thing to another.

So when the Bible says we are to "Consider him who endured such opposition." It literally means that if Jesus dealt with suffering like the minute hand of a clock, we should be like the second hand and react in proportion to the way He did. He is our analogy. Because He is the rock of ages, when we face adversity we should stand as solid as a rock. In this passage we are giving two pictures of Jesus.

### **A. He is identified as the author of our faith.**

As an author creates a story, Jesus is the One who created our salvation. The Bible says, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation." (2 Corinthians 5:17 NIV). We are to run the race marked out for us. Who marked it out? Jesus did. He is the author, the creator of a unique plan for your life.

As I mentioned in the last message, we all start out running the race in the wrong direction. We were all sprinting as fast as we could toward death and hell. But Jesus has written a new beginning and ending to the story of our life. He calls us to repent, turn around and put our faith in Him. He has authored a new ending to our story and it's a good plan. It's not up to you to write your own story. God already has one written for you; all you need to do is discover it. But God won't force this plan on you. He wants you to choose to follow Him. Here's the summary of the plan God has for you. "For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord. "Plans to prosper you and not to harm you; plans to give you a hope and a future." (Jeremiah 29:11 NIV)

### **B. He is identified as the perfecter of our faith.**

One of my favorite promises from the Bible says, "I am sure of this, that he who started a good work in you<sup>1</sup> will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus." (Philippians 1:6 CSB) When I first memorized this verse in the King James Version; it was "author and finisher." But

He hasn't finished with me yet. Young ladies used to be sent to finishing schools, but I'm not sure if any of them were ever finished being finished. It's a process.

So what does it mean when the Bible says He is the perfecter of our faith? First, when I type that word perfecter in MS Word, it comes up as a misspelling, because according to the Microsoft spell check there is no word "perfecter." I like that, because the greatness of Jesus is so far beyond the description of English or any other language that the Word programmers don't even understand who a perfecter is.

So here's an open letter to Bill Gates and Microsoft.

Dear Mr. Gates and Microsoft Word engineers,

Every time I type the word "perfecter" in MSWord, the spell check doesn't recognize it as a real word. And I can see the perfect humor in that, because I'm sure Microsoft understands imperfection. Because when all of us are born, we are all imperfect persons. But when Jesus came, He was the only perfect man who ever lived. He died a perfect death on the cross and experienced a perfect resurrection. And now Jesus has come to live in me and He is making me like Him more each day. He gives me perfect peace because my mind is stayed on Him. And my strength is made perfect in weakness. And He became my perfect sacrifice for sins. And His perfect love casts out all fear. So although I am not yet perfect, He is living in me and making me perfecter and perfecter every day. So please add this word to your spell check.

Sincerely,  
David O. Dykes

So Jesus authored our faith; He created it. And He is daily making us more and more like His perfect character. So be thankful that Jesus is changing us. We're not there yet, but He is working on us every day. Repeat this after me: "I'm not where I want to be. But Praise God I'm not where I used to be!"

## **II. CONSIDER WHAT JESUS DID.**

We are to consider Him who endured such opposition. Our lives should be an analogy of how Jesus endured on the way to the cross. I want us to consider three ways in which Jesus endured.

### **A. He endured a shameful cross.**

The Bible says, "Who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame." I want to paint a picture for you. Here is the cross of Jesus. On this side of the cross there is nothing but shame. Then there is the cross. Then beyond the cross there is joy. Here's what Jesus did. He considered all the shame of the cross. A crucifixion was the most shameful way to die. The Jews stoned Stephen and he probably lasted ten minutes before he died. The Romans beheaded

their citizens who were guilty of capital crimes. WOOSH! In two seconds they were dead. But crucifixion was a long, slow, public, shameful form of execution. First the prisoner was stripped completely naked. All the paintings of the cross add a loincloth for decency, but nakedness was part of the shame. Those crucified sometimes hung on crosses for many days until they slowly and agonizingly died. And the Romans often left the corpses to rot as a warning to others. What shame!

But there was another shame Jesus saw at the cross. It was the shame of taking on the sins of humanity. He embraced the vile, rotten, putrid guilt of every liar, every thief, every murderer, every child molester, and every proud, abusive person who would every walk on the face of the earth. He saw the shame of His snow-white innocent character being polluted with all the filthy of human immorality. He saw the shame of having His Father turn away, unable to even look upon sin.

And Jesus looked at all that shame and he scoffed at it. It was like, "Is that all you got, Satan? I can handle that." Because Jesus was looking beyond the shame and He was thinking of the joy beyond the cross. It was the joy of fulfilling His Father's plan. He saw the joy as the Lamb of God slain from the foundation of the world. He saw the joy of the forgiveness that would be offered to billions of people. He saw the joy of restoring the paradise that had been lost in the Garden of Eden, so He didn't slow down. He didn't stop. He kept on running on all the way to the cross. He scoffed at the shame and kept His eyes on the prize of the joy before Him. He is our analogy; we are to endure shame as well and keep our eyes on the joy before us.

## **B. He endured terrible opposition.**

The Bible says, "Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men." The shame of the cross involved the physical and spiritual pain Jesus endured. But I believe this refers to the personal pain Jesus endured because He was rejected and despised by men. He came to bring people God's love, and sinful men opposed Him. The Bible says He came unto His own and His own received Him not. The Jewish people basically rejected their Messiah. The Jewish leaders opposed Jesus every step of the way. They constantly tried to expose Him as a phony. They tried to trip Him up with trick questions. But He endured at every point of opposition. Until finally the High Priest and the Sanhedrin accused Him of blasphemy. But Jesus never lost His cool. He is our example, our analogy.

As followers of Jesus Christ, we are going to face increasing opposition from sinful men in the days to come. Our current culture considers the Bible to be an outdated old book of rules that should be ignored today in our age of relativistic truth.

And for any Christian or any church who insists that God's Word is the basis for all moral truth, we will be opposed as old fashioned. And the time will come in the future when we will be attacked because of our discrimination against the so-called precious rights of others. So what can we do? Like Jesus, we endure. We keep on speaking the truth in love. And we don't back up, give up, or let up, or back down until we are caught up.

### **C. He endured all the way to a throne.**

The Bible says Jesus "sat down at the right hand of the throne of God." The night before Jesus was crucified He told His disciples, "I came from the Father and entered this world; now I am leaving the world and going back to the Father." (John 16:28) Jesus had occupied a throne in heaven from the beginning of the beginning. But He left that throne to come down to live among us. Andraé Crouch used to sing a chorus that said, "He left His might throne in glory; to bring to us redemption's story."

He endured the cross; He endured the opposition of sinful men. He died, and was buried and on the third day, Jesus rose again. Then forty days later He ascended back into Heaven where He was seated at the right hand of the throne of God. He is our analogy of endurance.

### **III. CONSIDER HOW I MUST RESPOND TO JESUS.**

The truth in the Bible always forces us to ask, "So what?" So how am I now going to live based upon the truth God has given me? There are at least two ways in which we need to respond after we truly consider Jesus as our analogy.

#### **A. Never lose sight of Jesus!**

The Bible says, "Let us fix our eyes on Jesus." We're running a race that is marked out for us. But this isn't a competition. Sometimes we spend our time looking at how all the other runners are doing instead of keeping our eyes on Jesus.

I love the funny joke about two old boys, Bubba and Willy, who were out in the woods hunting squirrels. Suddenly they came up on a big old mean bear. They both shot their squirrel guns at the bear. All that did was make him mad. So the bear started chasing Bubba and Willy. They were running side-by-side as fast as they could to get away from the bear that was right behind them. While Bubba was running for his life, he started kicking of his hunting boots so he could run a little faster. Willy looked over and said, "Bubba, why are you doing that? You know you can't outrun that bear. Old Bubba said, "I don't have to outrun that bear. I just have to outrun you!"

We're not running to compete with anybody else. Don't look at the other runners. Keep your eyes fixed on Jesus. When Peter was walking on the water, he was doing fine until he started looking at all the waves and wind. Then he started to sink. The same thing happens to us when we take our eyes off Jesus.

A few months ago when I was talking about faith, I introduced you to the daredevil, Charles Blondin. In 1859 He was the first man to walk across Niagara Falls on a tightrope. Thousands of people came out to see him, and dozens fainted at the sight. He pushed an empty wheelbarrow across once to the applause of the crowd. He asked, "How many of you think I can push a man in this wheelbarrow across." Hands shot up in the crowd. He asked, "How many of you are willing to get in the wheelbarrow and let me push you?" All the hands went down. They

didn't have enough real faith in Blondin to trust him to carry them across. Later, his assistant rode across on his back. He was the only one who placed his faith in Blondin. Over the years, Blondin crossed Niagara Falls over 300 times. He walked across backwards and forwards.

He was once asked the secret to his amazing stability. He pointed to a large silver star he had painted on each side of the river. He said, "Whatever I do, I never take my eyes off the star. I never look at the water or the rope. Staring at that star is the secret to my stability."

Jesus is our bright and morning star, and as long as you keep your eyes fixed on Jesus you can find the stability to finish the race.

## **B. Never lose heart!**

The Bible says the reason we must consider Jesus is "So that you will not grow weary and lose heart." As we run the race that is laid out before us, it's easy to get weary. And the dangerous by-product of spiritual weariness is that we lose our enthusiasm and we give up on the race.

In Hebrews 6 and 10 we met a category of people who were once affiliated with the believers in the early churches. You can call them dropouts, or deserters. They may seem to be believers, but they are the make-believers. The mark of a true believer is that you won't give up on the race. You may grow tired and want to quit but then you consider Jesus; you keep your eyes on Jesus and then you keep on running.

I've mentioned before that distance runners talk about reaching a point in a race where they hit the wall. Some runners quit at that point. But the champions gut it out. They concentrate on the next step and the next breath. They don't think, "I can't do this." Instead they are thinking, "One more step. Put your foot in front of the other, and keep on moving."

And that's the way life is for us. Sometimes circumstances and people beat us up. We're already tired, and we get to the place where we are about to lose heart. The Bible says, "Don't lose heart! Consider Him."

Yes things are hard. But the writer asks us, "Has anyone driven nails through your hands and feet and nailed you to a cross yet?" In Hebrews 12:4 he pointed out, "In your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood." For many Christians it came to that point. And for many Christians living in dangerous places today, they are shedding their blood. But for those of us who are believers here. We may face opposition and we may face criticism, but nobody has nailed us to a cross yet, so consider Jesus and don't start give up.

## **CONCLUSION**

So what's our final take-away? Because Jesus endured, we can also endure. One of my favorite Christian songs has always been "The Day He Wore My Crown" sung by Sandi Patty. It's a song about how Jesus endured to suffer in our place. Part of the lyrics say: "He could have called His Holy Father, and said, "Take me away. Please take me away." He could have said, "I'm not

guilty. And I'm not gonna' stay and I'm not gonna pay." But he walked right through the gate; and then on up the hill. And as He fell beneath the weight, He cried, 'Father, not my will.' And I'm the one to blame. I caused all his pain. He gave Himself, the day He wore my crown."

So friend, when times get tough, consider Him who endured. When the race gets long, and you get weary, consider Him who endured. When you feel like you can't take another step, keep your eyes on Jesus and consider Him who endured. And by His power you can endure to end as well. So for the JOY that is before you, you can make it.

## OUTLINE

### I. CONSIDER WHO JESUS IS.

#### A. The author of our faith.

"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation." *2 Corinthians 5:17 NIV*

#### B. The perfecter of our faith.

"I am sure of this, that he who started a good work in you<sup>1</sup> will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus." *Philippians 1:6 CSB*

### II. CONSIDER WHAT JESUS DID.

#### A. Endured a shameful cross.

"Who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame."

#### B. Endured terrible opposition.

"Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men."

#### C. Endured all the way to a throne.

"sat down at the right hand of the throne of God."

### III. CONSIDER HOW I MUST RESPOND TO JESUS.

#### A. Never lose sight of Jesus!

"Let us fix our eyes on Jesus."

#### B. Never lose heart!

"So that you will not grow weary and lose heart."

TAKE-AWAY TRUTH: Because Jesus endured, we can endure!



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For the Joy...  
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