



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Hebrews 12:1–3

“The Christian Race”

TRANSCRIPT

It’s time for us to begin; let’s open with a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we ask Thy blessing upon us as we turn, again, to the Scriptures and we ask that they may minister to us, as they do constantly, when we turn to them. We thank Thee for the way in which they point us back to the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ to us, reminding us of many of the great blessings that are ours through the Lord Jesus Christ and urging us on to further growth in the spiritual life. We thank Thee for the epistle that we’ve been studying and all that it contributes to us, reminding us of the great High Priest that we have and also urging us on to the kind of life that will glorify His name and also be the means by which we, ourselves, may be strengthened, edified, built up in our faith. We ask Thy blessing upon us, particularly this evening, and we pray for the families of all of those who are represented here and ask Thy blessing upon them. We thank Thee, Lord, that we can turn to Thee and know that Thou dost hear our petitions. We remember the promises of our infinite Lord Jesus Christ that if we ask we shall receive. And, therefore, we thank Thee for the promises and the answers that are given us, through Him. Be with us now as we study together.

In Jesus’ name. Amen.

[Message] Well, the subject tonight as we are turning to chapter 12, is “The Christian Race,” and I want to read verse 1 through verse 3, for our Scripture reading. The author of the epistle, scholars call him simply, *Altor*, which is the Latin word for author. So we don’t know his name, but we do know that he must have been one of the great Christian figures of his day.

Now, having finished the chapter that has been often called “The Westminster Abbey of Faith,” with the great picture of the saints who have lived their lives and have been the means for the glorification of God in Heaven, he turns now to exhortation. And he writes.

“Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith.”

Now, “our” in the Authorized Version and “our” in the version that I’m reading, The New King James Version, is in italics, which means simply that it’s been supplied by the translators. Their interpretation of this is that it is “our” faith. But so far as the text itself is concerned, it simply says “and finisher of faith,” which raises other possibilities of interpretation. We’ll talk about it a little later.

“But the author and finisher or completer, or perfecter of faith who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls.”

The Bible views the Christian life under many, many metaphors and figures. For example, just picking out some of them that are set forth in the New Testament, the Christian life is a warfare. The Apostle Paul in 2 Timothy chapter 2, in verse 3, writes these words, “You therefore must endure

hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. We all know the Hymn that speaks so of our being soldiers. “Onward Christian Soldiers,” so it’s not surprising to think of the Christian life as warfare.

It’s also spoken of in the New Testament as wrestling. Ephesians, chapter 6, in verse 12 says, “For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in heavenly places.” And so the Christian life is a wrestling match.

It is, also, a prizefight. In 1 Corinthians chapter 9 in verse 26 and verse 27, the Apostle writes, “Therefore, I run thus, not with uncertainty, thus I fight, not as one who beats the air,” and not as one sparring, “not as one who beats the air, but I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest when I preach to others I, myself, should become disqualified.” If the Christian life is a prizefight, then what is your record? Eight, one and one? You’ve won eight, lost one and tied one? Everybody has a record in heaven, I would presume, if this is a prizefight.

We also know, of course, that the Christian life is a slavery, and we are reminded by the Apostle Paul, who frequently uses this metaphor, that he was a slave of Jesus Christ. In Galatians chapter 6 in verse 17 he talks about the marks of a slave, and speaking in that 17th verse, he writes, “From now on, let no one trouble me, for I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus.” And those were, evidently, the brands of slavery.

The New Testament also speaks of the Christian life as what we might say as a farming operation. In 2 Timothy chapter 2 in verse 6, he says, “The hard working farmers must be first to partake of the crops,” and so the apostle argues that we are something like that.

And, of course, one of the great figures is the figure of marriage; and in Romans, chapter 7, the Apostle speaks of our relationship to the Lord as a marriage. This is what he says in verse 4 through verse 6 of chapter 7, “Therefore, my brethren, you also have become dead to the law through the body of Christ, that you may be married to another, to Him who was raised from the dead, that we should bear fruit to God. For when we were in the flesh, the sinful passions which were aroused by the law were at work in our members to bear fruit to death; but now we have been

delivered from the law, having died to what we were held by, so that we should serve in newness of spirit and not in oldness of the letter.”

So Christian life? A warfare, a wrestling match, a prizefight, slavery, we are farmers and there is also a son-father relationship, of course; very frequently in the New Testament, we are reminded that we are sons and our Father is in heaven. And so that relationship is a relationship as well. And the final one that I mentioned is marriage.

Well, the author of the epistle here gives what someone has called “supreme and classical expression to his outlook on life” and he thinks of the Christian life as a race. And I would think that that’s very contemporary. A race! And all of the things that have to do with racing are involved in Christian life. Our age is mad about doubt. Have you had your protein? Vitamins? What kind of diet are you on? A 5-day diet? A 7-day diet? No diet at all? Or, whatever? Are you sure that your food is the kind of food that does not put the kind of weight on that will be bad for your health? Are you a “weight” watcher? I pulled that on Martha this afternoon and said, “I’m a weight watcher,” and she said, “No, you’re not.” And then I said, “Yes, I am, because I pull out the scales and stand on it in the morning. And then stand on them at night, two times a day, I watch my weight.”

[Laughter] So I’m a weight watcher. Not a wheel-watcher, incidentally! A weight watcher.

So we are just so caught up in these things. Bicycles to ride. Incidentally, this may surprise you, but I have in my house a Nordic Track. I bought it maybe four years ago. I’ve been on it once in four years. [More laughter] And I go up and look at that every now and then. But I don’t look at that every morning, but every time I happen to go in the room where it is, I look at it. I looked at it today in order to prepare for this message this afternoon. [More laughter]

So isometrics. And I had in my notes, from a message that I gave before on this, an advertisement for a belt that you can get. You don’t have to subscribe to any diet. All you need is to buy this belt and just put that belt on and your weight will depart from you. Now, I haven’t seen any advertisements about it recently. That was some years ago, so I presume the company is out of business now because a belt is not a good way to take off weight; in spite of what they said for it.

We have all kinds of people involved in aerobics. And here, down at the end of the block, we have one of the headquarters of that kind of work. People come from my city in Charleston, South Carolina, and other places, I just happen to know some from Charleston, Christians come here, once a year, to check everything out, to see that they are all right, right down at the end of the corner. When they really ought to be stopping off at Believers Chapel for eternal health, which is far more significant than good health here. But we often forget things like that.

So are you doing your jogging? [Laughter] Or is it jiggling that you do? Dwight Pentecost once said when this particular interest in jogging first arose he said, “It seems to me it’s not jogging, as I look at them, but jiggling.” And a lot of them are like that. I do know some that come in front of my house, constantly. They are thin as rails and they are out jogging all the time. And I don’t know whether they are trying to become thinner or whether this is the successful conclusion of what they have been trying to do.

Now, coming back to our subject, “The Christian Life is a Race,” however. And furthermore, it’s one that we all must enter. It’s not like my Nordic Track, which you can buy and look at, everyday if you wish, or once a week, or once every month. But we are already enrolled in a race, whether we admit it or not, we are there in the race, running. The New Birth gets one to the starting line. It does not get us to the finish line. But every newly born individual, who belongs to Jesus Christ is enrolled in the race; and you are running it. You may not be running it very well, you may be running it very well. But you are in it. And it is a race; but more than just that which that race signifies. For the term that is used is the term from which we get the English word “agony.” So it’s a serious kind of race, *agon*, from which agony comes. And so it’s the kind of race that demands something from us. It’s not a sprint; it’s a marathon for most of us. We’ve lived for a long time as Christians; many of you in the audience as I have, and some of you are relatively new, of course, but this is a lifelong race, so it is not a sprint.

Our author says that we are to “run with endurance the race that is set before us.” And that is that there is a goal and we are on the track at the present time. And the goal is before us. The

question, of course, is, how shall we run? How does one run the Christian race? Well, many things could be said about it. The Apostle says some things here or the author says some things here and we will look at the things that he says. And, no doubt, many of the helps that will make us successful in running this race are found right here. There may be some things in other passages, too, that are important.

But, let's look now at the motivation for the race. “Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses.” That term is a term that can mean martyrs. Now, I don't think that's the meaning here, but that's the term that is very closely associated with it, for those who were “witnesses” often became martyrs. And that's the word. “So great a cloud of witnesses.”

Now, two views, two interpretive views, have been held about these witnesses that surround us. And so we have to ask the question, what are the alternatives? And what is perhaps the author's meaning? He could be talking about the Old Testament saints. He's just given us a chapter of forty verses in which he has set forth that long string of great believing people of the Old Testament, beginning with Abel and all the way through, down through Rahab. And then there were so many that finally, the last part of the chapter 32 through 40, contains an entire section of many, many names. And we looked briefly at it last week.

It's possible that when he says, “Therefore, we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses,” that he is picturing us as being in a stadium, and then the Old Testament saints who are spectators in the stadium, wondering, observing how we're going to finish the race. In that case, they would be looking at us and we would be running the race.

Now, of course, there's something that someone could say in favor of that. Obviously, good interpreters have suggested that that's what's in view because it's not long after this comment that he will make reference to those who have been in the presence of the Lord, and these Old Testament saints are in the presence of the Lord now, and so, it's possible that that is the author's meaning. I, personally, have a little question about it.

The other interpretation is that the Old Testament saints are referred to, but not as spectators of us, but as witnesses in Scripture; that is, as they are set forth in Scripture because he has just given us again the forty verses of chapter 11, in which he has talked about the works of faith, which those great men have done. In that case, the Old Testament saints are witnesses in Scripture to faith, and thus, they are witnesses to us.

In verse 2, we read of chapter 11, “For by it the elders obtained a good testimony.” And then in verse 39 of chapter 11, “And all these, having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise.” Now, if that is true then it is not what we see in them that is to be an incentive for us; but what they see in us. Or turn it around, depending on the interpretation that we want to take. It is what we see in them and not what they see in us.

The lives of the Old Testament saints are motivational for us because we said that Abel was one who illustrated the sacrifice of faith. That Enoch illustrated the walk of faith for he walked with God. Noah, the work of faith, for he built that ark for a lengthy period of time, exposed to all of the criticisms of the people about him, the laughter and other things that make up a persons walk by faith. Abraham, of course, the great obedience of faith, manifested in his life, is a motivation for us, for he believed in the Lord and he accounted it to him for righteousness and then his life was characterized by obedience, the obedience of faith.

The Patriarchs, as a general rule, considering all of those in chapter 11, illustrate the kind of faith that one might call “death overcoming faith” because they believed, in spite of their experiences, even when they suffered death, they believed. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were tempted, they were slain with the sword, all of those things the author talks about in chapter 11. So they illustrate that. Rahab, of course, illustrates the deliverance of faith.

So, what this seems to say to us, as we think about it, is that our God is not only a God of yesterday, but also of today, and he will later say that. That Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever. And, therefore, we should be motivated by the kinds of lives that the individuals set forth in chapter 11 have lived.

I think that is probably what he means when, “Therefore,” by saying, “Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily ensnare us,” or beset us.

So, now, let’s turn to the mandates of the race. Scholars, of course, have been, really for centuries wondering, “Who was the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews?” A large number have thought that Paul was the author of the epistle. The 13th chapter gives a few clues that might support that interpretation. Others have given such names as Barnabas. Perhaps the most common name other than Paul was Luther’s suggestion in the 16th Century, and he suggested that Apollos was the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews. The description given of Apollos in the book of Acts as a man who was mighty in the Scriptures and an Alexandrian, and fervent in the faith, fits all we know about this author, because the language is Alexandrian, in a number of places, contrary to the kind of language that Paul usually uses, and the structure of the sentences is generally different. And so, perhaps, Apollos did write the Epistle to the Hebrews. But we really do not know. We know that he was familiar with Alexandrian terminology.

Now, if we could find a list, if the archaeologists could find a list of the members of the Alexandria track and field club, that this man is one who is interested in running a race, we might find down the list, Apollos, a member. That would settle the question. But no one has uncovered to this point the list of members of the Alexandria track and field club. And so far as I know, not anyone is looking for that because it certainly seems impossible that we would find it. So we can only say this, that he was a man who knew what it was to race and he knew enough about it that he could use it as a biblical illustration so effectively. So, in my opinion, maybe he was a member, but that’s pure speculation.

Now, notice what he says about running this race. Some of it’s rather convicting. “Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight.” Keep your weight down. Keep your weight down. Now, those of you that walk out and

feel convicted, please come back next week. We’ll not be looking at your body, but keep your weight down.

Now, of course, he’s talking about our spiritual weight; not our physical weight. So if you want to come in with a great big pot, that’s all right. That’s all right. We’re talking about spiritual weight, which is, incidentally, far more important.

So incidentally, this word “weight” is a medical term. It’s the term *onchos*. And if you know anything about cancer, you know that a cancer specialist is an oncologist. He is one who deals with “weight.” Actually, it derives from the fact that the word came to mean a tumor, and thus, he is one who deals with a tumor. So oncology is the science of tumors, and that is our cancer specialist.

So every ounce of superfluous flesh, keep your weight down. You cannot run a marathon in white tie and tails. You cannot run in patent leather shoes. You cannot run with a cummerbund. So, consequently, any kind of spiritual dressing that might be compared to what you wear when you attend the ball is something that won’t do in the spiritual race.

Weights? What are the weights? Well, in my opinion, the weights are not first and foremost, sins. Now, of course, obviously, we want to avoid sin; those things that are specifically set forth in the Bible as being sin. But the things, I think, that he has in mind are the things that could even include the pleasures of life. The things you’re involved in, rather than having first the things of the Lord in mind. They would include gardening. Now, there’s nothing wrong with gardening. But if gardening keeps you from the word of God and keeps you from Christian testimony and keeps you from having our Lord first in your life, Monday through Sunday, then gardening is a weight. Something as incidental as gardening can be a weight.

Some people get up Saturday morning and they garden all day long, and they haven’t looked at the Bible all week. In that case, gardening is a weight. Or they’ve avoided testifying to their friends or acquaintances that they meet. They haven’t really given a Christian testimony of their own faith for weeks and weeks maybe months, but in the meantime, they spent their time in other things. That would be what, I’m sure, this author would call a weight. Golf? Now, he’s becoming a

meddler. Golf? Well, golf, too. There are people who go out to the golf course, three or four times a week. You know what that takes? That’s about six or seven hours. One hour to think about it in the morning, one hour to get out there, hit a few shots, three hours to play the round, if everybody gets out of your way. And they ought to get out of your way, of course. And then, one hour when you come in, because you’ve got to tell everybody what you did. The 19th hole takes a considerable amount of time for some people, but golf can be a hindrance too. It’s one of these weights that he talks about. There’s nothing wrong with playing golf. I wish I could play more than I do play. But, nevertheless, it can be a weight.

Hunting? Your associations, your associations can be weights; the things that keep us from this Christian race in which we are enrolled. So many of us run the Christian race and stop and talk to the spectators, all the time. How well would you do in the Olympics if you are running the marathon, and you stop every mile or so and carry on a little conversation with people? You wouldn’t do very well.

Like I was reading in the newspaper, the other day, that somebody in some race was cutting corners. And I noticed, they said that was okay. They finally let him win the race. He cut corners. And his excuse was they do that in Europe. And so, consequently, they said, okay, and let him run the race. That was really, I believe, an automobile, I, I’ve forgotten whether he was running an automobile or whether he was running himself, but, at any rate that’s what he did. He cut the corners. And so we cut corners. The question is, what are you doing? Is it a weight? Or is it something that enables you to run the race more effectively?

As Samuel Rightout, the Christian Brethren author, said in his little book on Hebrews, which has some good things within it, he said, “Is what you’re doing a weight? Or is it a wing?” That is, is it something that helps you, or is it something that really hurts you?

Now, he goes on to say, “Let us lay aside every weight, and the sin with which doth so easily beset us.” That’s the way the Authorized Version renders it. My text says, “The sin which so easily ensnares us.” Now, what is that sin? Well, we’re not absolutely certain about this. I would imagine

that in the light of what he has been saying here, that the “sin which doth so easily beset us,” or as Phillips’ renders it, “The sin which dogs our feet,” is the sin about which he’s been talking. Now, that sin, specifically, in chapter 11, is unbelief; because that’s what he’s been saying. “By faith!” By faith, by faith, by faith. And so the sin which “doth so easily ensnare us,” would be that sin of unbelief. So it would seem to me that that is probably what he has in mind. Unbelief does easily ensnare us, it does easily beset us, it does dog our feet constantly. Our great problems, in the Christian life, are caused, I think, all of us would agree largely, by the fact that we don’t believe the word of God and trust the word of God in the experiences of life.

So keep the limbs free. Don’t run around with a Harris tweed kind of spiritual overcoat that is too big for you. Thee sin, it seems to me, is the sin of unbelief; the one he talked about in chapter 11, verse 1, “Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.”

Now, having talked about the mandates for the race, keep your weight down, keep your limbs free, believing in the Lord Jesus Christ, not being ensnared by the kinds of things that keep us from putting the Lord Jesus Christ first. He describes how we should run this race. He says, first of all, that we should run this race, “looking unto Jesus.” This word means “to look away to.” It’s a word that means, in a sense, to run the race, but have our Lord before us constantly. “Look away to.” It reminds us of the term that is used back with reference to Moses, in verse, let’s see, verse 27, “For he endured as seeing Him who is invisible.” And then, in other places, I believe in the 11th chapter, there is another statement that says much the same thing. So, first of all, to “look away to our Lord.” How important the ideas are in the Christian race.

Have you noticed how in almost all sports, eyes are important? You hear quarterbacks on defensive football teams say, “I keep my eyes constantly on the quarterback of the opposing team and watch carefully.” And even, sportswriters talk about a quarterback who “looks off” the defense, by looking in a way as if he’s going to pass for one side of the field and passing to the other side of the field. And so you can just image all of those quarterbacks are constantly watching the

quarterback, to see which way he’s looking. The eyes are very important in athletics; the kind of place that we have our eyes upon. It’s important in almost all sports.

The boxer? So, I’m told, I wouldn’t dare get in a ring, but the boxer, I am told, when he is in a ring, the things that he has his eyes on all the time are the gloves of his opponent. He’s watch those gloves because danger comes when he doesn’t keep his eyes on those gloves. He doesn’t look around at the crowd. Some of them do, but their man has to be on the floor before he looks around at the crowd. But it’s important how we look.

Boxing, golf, football, almost every kind of sport, the eyes are important. And our author, here when he says “looking unto Jesus,” reminds us how important it is in the Christian life, to keep our eyes pointed toward our Lord.

Now, of course, we cannot see him. But, looking toward him is looking toward him as he is set forth in the word of God, and set forth in the word of God in the promises that are found in the word of God, that are directed toward us. Even in the last World Series, one of the pitchers of the Toronto Blue Jays, one of his greatest skills was that fierce look that he had in his eyes. And, even there, the eyes can become an aggressive type of ability. So the eyes are important in the Christian life; having our eyes upon the Lord, and having our eyes upon him, as he is set forth in the word of God and the promises that are given to us, in the experiences of life. Remembering what they are, in the times when they are needed, is the secret of the life of faith and the life of success in the Christian race.

Now, our illustration, of course, is the Lord Jesus. And, when he says, “Looking unto Jesus,” he says some things about him. He says, first, that he’s “the author” of faith. He’s the pioneer. This is the word, incidentally, that’s used back in chapter 2 in verse 10. I’d like for you to turn back there, and take a look at chapter 2, verse 10, for there we are told that the Lord Jesus Christ was the captain of their salvation. Let me look at it again. Verse 10 of chapter 2, “For it is fitting for Him for whom are all things and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation, perfect through sufferings.” That’s a term that means

“captain” or “pioneer,” the captain, the pioneer of our faith in this instance, the captain of our salvation, the pioneer of our salvation.

Back there in chapter 2, verse 20, he was speaking of our Lord as our great representative. He’s on his way to salvation, and we belong to him. We are in his train. He’s the pioneer and we belong to the train. He’s the captain of their salvation. Not of “His salvation” their salvation. And so, we are those who belong to him. And here, he says, “Looking unto Jesus, the author,” the pioneer, the captain. I think author is the sense here, the author of faith.

And then, he says, “The finisher of faith.” Not the finisher of our faith. It is true, of course, that it is our Lord who will ultimately be responsible for our sanctification, our complete sanctification, when we enter the presence of the Lord. That is something accomplished by our Triune God in Heaven. And we could say, “He’s the finisher of our faith.” But that isn’t what this says, in my opinion. He says, “He’s the finisher of faith,” or, “He’s the perfecter of faith.” He’s the one who has perfectly realized faith in his life. If you want to know what faith is, in its perfection, you don’t look at Abraham. For Abraham failed. You don’t look at Moses. For Moses failed. All of those men, in the Old Testament, they all failed. But our Lord never failed. And so faith finds its perfection in the life of Jesus Christ. He blazed the trail to the triumphant conclusion of life.

Now, you might ask a question here, after all, he’s talking about people who were living in the Old Testament times. And they had faith, didn’t they? They didn’t look to Jesus, did they? Why then, now, does he say, “Looking unto Jesus,” when the Old Testament saints didn’t look to Jesus, did they? Why do we necessarily have to look to him?

Well, of course, I don’t know that anyone would think of this objection, who is not a scholar in a theological seminary or something like that, but, nevertheless, it is a little question that we might ask and so, I’d like for you to turn over to Jude, verse 5, and we’ll seek to answer this; this type of question that a person in a theological seminary might want to ask. Probably, first of all, this question arose in order for the student to stump his professor not because he was really interested in

it particularly, but he wanted to stump his professor. And there’s never been an earnest theological student, in any seminary, who didn’t want to stump his professor. That’s the nature of the student.

Now, I probably have cut down on any questions tonight. But, it also is found in groups like this, too. “I want to stump Dr. Johnson.” It’s not too hard to stump me. But anyway, the author of the Epistle of Jude says in the 5th verse, “But I want to remind you, though you once knew this, that the Lord, having saved the people out of the land of Egypt, afterward destroyed those who did not believe.”

Now, I cannot be certain of this, but there is good textual testimony to the effect that the term “Lord” should be rather than Lord, “Jesus.” In other words, the Old Testament salvation is the product of our Lord. If you look at the textual witnesses and you will see that Jude should read, “The Lord saved the people out of Egypt.” But two of the great manuscripts and others as well many others have simply “Jesus.”

In other words, the writers of the New Testament were regarding the Lord, who was saving the people of Israel, as being the pre-incarnate Lord Jesus Christ, because He is pre-eminently the covenant God for us. He’s our representative. He’s the one who offers the sacrifice. He’s our great High Priest, who prays for us. He’s the one who’s responsible for bringing all of his people into heaven. And since he’s the eternal Son, it’s not difficult for us to see that the eternal Son, who had a number of pre-incarnate appearances in the Old Testament is the one of whom our author is thinking when he talks about our Lord as being the “author and perfecter of faith,” both in the Old Testament and in the New Testament.

And, I have no doubt at all, but when we get to heaven, we are going to discover that our Lord has been more active than even we could have imagined, all through the Old Testament period of time, in bringing his people on into heaven, so that they might rejoice together in the family of God. So he’s the pioneer; he’s the perfect realizer of faith. He blazed the trail to the triumphant conclusion that is set forth in the word of God. So the perfect realizer of faith is the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Old Testament in Psalm 22 in verse 9, which is a Psalm that looks to our Lord Jesus, himself; speaks of him being nurtured in faith on his mother’s breast, as the God-man. There are other texts that point out our Lord’s faith in the Old Testament period, and so it’s not surprising that we should have this statement. He was preeminently the man of faith. Even when he was hanging on the cross, and the enemies of our Lord looked at him, what did they say about him? He trusted in God. Isn’t that interesting? He trusted in God. As a matter of fact, you could preach the Gospel from the things that the enemies of our Lord said about him. He trusted in God. He saved others and so on. But, preeminently, he trusted in God. He is the representative of faith, in its highest development even though development is a word I wouldn’t have used with reference to him.

What has he done? He goes on to say, “He endured the cross, he despised the shame and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.” He went into the somber valley of death; he emerged amid the rising Son of life and resurrection, which is the proof of our Lord’s ability to save. “I am the resurrection and the life, he that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live; and he that liveth and believeth in Me, shall never die.” The only life that ever overcomes death is the life of our Lord Jesus Christ, found in his saints, so they shall overcome death that life is “the” life of all lives.

There are people who like to tell us that we may be saved apart from our Lord Jesus Christ, that we don’t really have to have faith in him, specifically. Some say we can be saved by the example of our Lord’s life, and if we just follow in general the example of our Lord’s life, then we too will be saved.

There’s a marvelous story that illustrates the foolishness of thinking that we could be saved by an example. It arises out of an incident that happened to Dr. Joseph Parker, who was the pastor of the City Temple of London, England. Paderewski the great Polish pianist, when I was a little kid, people talked about Paderewski. And he was a great pianist. He came to London and gave a concert in the daytime. And that night, addressing a large congregation, Dr. Parker spoke these words, “I have had, today, most forcibly presented to me, the folly of trusting in the power of a great example.

Many of you know that I've always been a lover of music, and some of my friends have been kind enough to make me believe that I had some talent as a pianist. It has often been my delight, when weary of other things, to sit down at my piano and play some of the classical selections, or improvise according to my mood. But, today,” he said, “a friend took me to hear that great master of the piano, Paderewski. For two hours,” he said, “I listened, enthralled. I heard music that I had never heard in all my life before, and when the last lovely note was struck and the applause had died away, I felt I wanted to slip out quietly, speaking to no one, with the thrill of it still stirring my soul.”

He said, “An hour or so later, I was standing before my piano, when I was summoned for dinner. At first, I didn't hear the summons, and when my wife came to me, I turned to her and said, almost savagely, I'm afraid, 'Bring me an axe.' She looked at me anxiously and said, 'My dear? What do you mean?' I said, 'You know, I've always thought I was something of a pianist. But I've heard real music today, for the first time, and I realize now that what I thought was musical talent amounts to nothing. I feel like chopping my piano all to pieces. I never want to touch it again.’”

He said, “That was the effect of a great example upon my mind. I know that I shall overcome this, and shall soon enjoy my piano as I did in the past. But I realized then and I realize now, that no example such as that of Paderewski could ever make a great musician of me. In order to play as he played, one must have the soul of Paderewski. And, I guess, the skills also. To try to imitate him would be folly. And so it is in the matter of our salvation. “It's true that Christ has left an example that we should follow his steps.” Simon Peter, incidentally, says that. “But before we can do that, we need to receive the Spirit of Christ. We must be born again. There must be the very life of Christ communicated to us.”

That's how foolish it is for a person to think that he can actually get to heaven by following the example of the Lord Jesus Christ. You cannot follow his example. It's impossible. First of all, you have to have the Spirit of God. But even when you have the Spirit of God, you still have that old sin nature within you. You're still a sinner. If you don't believe it, look at me. You're still a sinner. And if you need some more shining examples, well, look around at the Christian family.

They all stand there as sinners. They need a new life. Imitation is not the way to salvation. So, here, the author has said, “He endured the cross, he despised the shame, and He has sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on High.”

I have, in my notes, a story of a German woman, after World War I. She went through World War I, and if you remember the facts of World War I, near the end of the war, the Germans were in a horrible condition, as you might expect, because they were going to lose that war. And they had been rationing, and rationing, and rationing things, so that people had very little food. And there is a story of a woman, who finally made her way to the North Sea, and looked out over the North Sea and said, “Ah, after all, there is something that they cannot ration.”

So our Lord’s marvelous work is what he has done, despising the shame. And now, his familiar word, “He sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.” That’s what he said back in chapter 1 in verse 3, remember? When he said, concerning the Lord Jesus Christ, “Who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.” The work of atonement done by him. He sat down. No priest ever did that, we pointed out, more than once. No high priest ever did it. They always had to work. Our Lord finished the work. And again, he mentions it, “He endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the Throne of God.” He won the race. And then, our author says, “For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls.”

Let me close, on these notes.

First, the Christian life is a race. It’s not a jog. It’s not a stroll. It’s not a saunter. It’s not a jaunt. It’s not a constitution. It’s something that we run, run, energy in living this life. And, second, the Christian life is run before a great cloud of witnesses; irrefutable proof that genuine faith does not fail. In fact, he began, after that 11th chapter, chapter 12, by saying in verse 1 of chapter 11, and as he begins chapter 12, with this one word. “Therefore we also.” That’s something. That little

expression, an unusual word, really it means “mark you, for this reason, therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let’s lay aside every weight.” And we run, then, “Looking unto Jesus” as the enabler and the example. It’s remarkable, the many things Scripture says about our relationship to our Lord. I don’t have time to look at the verses, but I’m just going to recite them. We’ve done this before sometime past. He is before us according to the word of God. He is behind us. He is by our side. He is below us. He is above us. He is round about us. And, most of all, he’s in us. All of these little prepositions are used with reference to the Lord’s relationship to us.

We can say that the faith that is given in regeneration is nurtured in sanctification and is the channel by which God’s power is released in our lives. *Soli deo Gloria*, To God alone be the glory.

There was a man who once looked unto Jesus. He walked on the water. Peter. You remember, he said, “Lord, if it’s you, bid me come unto you?” And the biggest miracle of Matthew 14, is the fact that Peter got out of that boat, and actually walked on the water. Now, he couldn’t make it to our Lord, because he was a sinner. But he really did walk on the water. Our Lord’s not the only one who can walk on the water. Peter walked on the water. He also sank in the water. And, fortunately, he knew enough about the Lord to say, “Save me?” And he walked so close to our Lord that all our Lord had to do was to reach out his hand. I think he got overconfident. The text is not clear about this. But he walked and he looked, he took one look at those waves about him and he began to sink because, if you take your eyes off of him, that’s what will happen. You will sink too. You’re no better than Peter! You’re just like Peter! And, you’ll sink, also.

I think of that experience of Peter after he has sinned, denying our Lord three times before the cock crows twice and then as our Lord goes off in custody, he looked at Peter. And Peter went out and wept bitterly. That’s the picture of a saint. A great saint. A fallen saint, but a great saint; one who gets down on his knees and weeps bitterly over his sin and Peter did that.

I’d like to close with just this little story. Erich Sauer mentions it. He says, “In a West European city, there was once a royal visit, and the streets were lined with crowds of people. In the

foremost line, waiting to see the royal visitor stood a mother and her little boy. At last, the royal guest arrived and with him, the pomp of his court and drove by. Everything happened relatively quickly. Suddenly the young mother stretched out her arm and enthusiastically pointed to the king as he drove by so that her little boy should see him, and with a loud voice, she cried out, ‘Look at him and never forget it all your life.’” I can know how a mother would say it. “Look at him and never forget it all your life.” I wouldn’t do that with Bill Clinton. But it’s possible that some day our president may be that kind of man. After all, miracles do happen and what we think are miracles. But, I think I understand precisely what she meant. “Look at him and never forget it all your life.” I say to you: Look unto Jesus and in all the experiences of life, never forget how great our Lord Jesus Christ is and, what he does for sinners that he will do for you.

My prayer for you is that you truly know our Lord as your own savior, who has endured the cross for sinners, and that you’ve come to receive the salvation that cost him so much. And then that you will remember that you are in a race, and that you’ll start laying aside the weights, and the sin that so easily ensnares you, and looking unto him, run with endurance, it’s a marathon, run with endurance the race that is set before you.

Let’s bow in prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we are indeed grateful and thankful for these exhortations, which we need, all of us need, so deeply. We’ve needed them all of our Christian lives. We need them still. Lord, enable us to truly look to our Lord Jesus Christ in the experiences of life. If there are any here who have not received eternal life as the divine gift, may they look at this very moment to him; giving thanks for the blood that was shed, the cross that was endured; and receive the life everlasting. For those of us who know him, O God, how often do we fail? Cause us, Lord, to run our race more successfully.

For Jesus’ sake. Amen.