

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. ²Let 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. ³Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart. (NIV84)

Theme: Fix your Eyes on Jesus.

1. He is the author and perfecter of faith.
2. He died and rose.

Running a race is hard. Take a marathon for example. 26.2 miles. That's a long way. That's about from here to Meijer on Wilder Road.. It's a long way. In order to run that far it takes months and months of training. Running long distances and eating right—getting in shape for the big race. Yet it is still a long way. It's no wonder that many people who try to run a marathon drop out. Others can't make it running all the way and have to resort to walking. Many people fail to finish because they weren't focused—either during the race or while they trained. They let their minds wander—they didn't keep their eyes on the prize. They lost their focus and so didn't receive the award they were seeking.

The same can be said about life. In the race of life there is really only one prize—eternal life in heaven. And the only way to receive this prize is through faith in Christ. That is why the Writer to the Hebrews tells us to, **fix our eyes on Jesus**. We do this because he is the author and perfecter of our faith, and he died and rose for us.

Running the race of life can be hard. First things first, you have to get a job. That often includes hard work. Long hours. And you plan for your future. You realize you won't be able to work forever, nor will you want to. So get by with less now so you can retire someday. On top of that you have to raise a family. You make sure they are well fed and clothed. You ensure they are doing their homework and are behaving as they should. But things don't always go as planned. You

get sick, family members get sick. There are numerous unseen circumstances that cause obstacles in the race of life. Add on top of all of that, being a Christian. Getting up on Sunday morning to worship Christ. Making sure that your children are brought up in the care and instruction of the Lord. Bringing them to Sunday School, BASIC, Confirmation Class, and the like. Finding them time to have family devotions. Finding the time yourself to study God's Word—at home and at Bible Class. Volunteering to take care of God's house. Setting aside some of the gifts God has given you to give back to him. Running the race of a Christian life is hard.

And we often get sidetracked along the way. All the activities of our life often cause our attention and focus to stray from what is truly important. You've got to get ahead at work, impress the bosses, get some overtime. Hopefully you can get a raise, or perhaps a promotion. So you invest all your time and effort into your job. You want your kids to be happy and successful. So you enroll them in many things as possible. And before you know it they have 2-3 different activities a night. You barely find time to get them to all their activities; let alone feed them and check up on their homework. You push and you push; you are always busy doing something. And eventually you just need a break—even if it is only for a few short days.

And what usually happens? God's Word gets neglected. Maybe not on purpose. But you've become so busy that you didn't even notice that God and his Word got pushed to the side years ago. You notice when working hard and making money became more important than worshipping God. It didn't even cross your mind that your children's activities may be hindering their faith. Getting a break is fine. But instead of finding rest for your soul in the forgiveness of Christ, fishing, shopping, or just sleeping in is used as a replacement.

We are often responsible for getting our own focus and attention off of Christ. But at times, others try to force our attention away. We face persecution when we are mocked and ridiculed because of our faith. They call us stupid and gullible for following Christ. They laugh that we would give our hard earned money to the spread of the gospel. They don't like the way we live—obeying God's Word. They don't like what we believe—rejecting evolution and the like. They call us

bigots for sticking to the truth of God's word, despite what others say about homosexuality. And so in different ways they try to get our focus off of Christ. They try to intimidate us. Or try mocking our faith. They want us to join them in their sinful actions. They want us to run a different race—their race. In many different ways they strive to get our focus off of Christ.

That is why the Writer to the Hebrews says, **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.** We throw off everything that hinders us from God's Word—no matter what it is or who it is from. We want to get rid of everything that may cause our focus to get off of Christ. So we cast off every sin. Everything that may lead us to sin. During the race of life we don't want to be sidetracked away from the prize. We don't want to focus our attention on something that will harm us.

So we follow what the writer to the Hebrews says, **Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith.** Focus on Jesus. Not on the things of this world. But on the Savior of the world. Or the one who is the author of our faith. The founder, the initiator of our faith. The one who gave us faith, who worked faith into our hearts through the gospel. We focus on him. For our faith is in him. And without him our faith is useless. Not only does he give us faith, but he keeps us in the one true faith. He watches over us and he guards and protects us against the attacks of the devil and this sinful world. And he is also called the perfecter of our faith. He is the one that completes our faith. You can say he is the finisher of our faith. He is the one who makes sure our faith meets its goal. And he will see us safely in heaven. There our faith will be made complete. There it will be made perfect. We focus not on the things of the world, but on Christ. For he is the beginning and the end of our faith.

But we fix our eyes on Jesus not just because he is the author and perfecter of our faith, but also because he died and rose for us.

In verse two, the Writer to the Hebrews mentions Jesus, **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.** We fix our eyes on

Jesus because he endured the cross for us. And not just the cross, but everything leading up the cross. He endured being betrayed by one of his closest followers. Arrested and put under an illegal trial by his fellow countrymen, those he was sent to save. Even though Pilate knew he was innocent, he still had Jesus flogged. He was beat, spit upon, and crowned with thorns. Forced to carry his own cross. He was nailed to that cross, upon which he died.

Who for the joy set before, we read. It was a joy for Jesus to do this? Jesus enjoyed it, not because he was a masochist, but because he knew what he would do through his suffering death. He knew that he would take all our sins upon himself. He would pay the price for our sins that we could pay. And he would give us his holy and perfect life. That is why it was a joy for Jesus to suffer—for it was a joy for him to save us. That is why he rode triumphantly into Jerusalem. He knew full well what was going to happen to him. But he didn't run away or cower. He rode forward with lowly pomp, announcing his arrival. The arrival of our Savior, who would willingly pay for our sins.

And that isn't the only thing that Jesus did. Jesus did die. But notice where he is now. Sitting **at the hand of the throne of God.** That means that Jesus rose from the dead. Three days after he died, Jesus was made alive. 40 days later he ascended into heaven. And there he rules over all people. He sits on his throne, and as God, rules over all his creation.

And because Jesus rose from the dead, we can be sure that we too will rise from the dead. When Jesus rose from the dead he defeated death. He crushed Satan's head. He won the ultimate victory. And he gives that victory to us. Through him we have the forgiveness of sins. Because of his work, we have eternal life. Through him we have the ultimate prize. We have the victory over sin, death, and the devil.

Because Jesus gives us the prize, we fix our eyes on him. And at times it's easy to do. Especially this time of year. Holy Week. Five services in eight days! Palm Sunday, Holy Week, and Easter Sunday are also quite popular worship services. There is a reason for that. We love to hear what Jesus did for us—his suffering and death to take away the guilt of all our sins. His resurrection that assures us that all who believe in him will not perish but have eternal life. It seems that

Easter time and Christmas time are when more people fix their eyes on Jesus. And for good reason.

But for many, that is about the only time they focus their lives on him. Life sidetracks us. Sure, they'll worship God from time to time. Whenever they find the time. When it is convenient for them. One gets the impression that they had no better plans, nothing else to do—so they decided to come and worship the Lord. Life gets in the way—and our focus is taken off of Christ. Work, sleep, chores, our children's sports schedules—they busy-up our calendars. We'll make time when we want to, especially during Easter and Christmas. But God often takes a back seat during other times of the year.

That is why Jesus rode into Jerusalem. That is why he willingly suffered and died. To remove the guilt of our sins. To comfort us with the message of forgiveness. For he Jesus suffered for us. He endured more than we can ever imagine so that we wouldn't have to. And that is why we take the focus off of the things of this world and fix our eyes on Jesus. As we are told in verse three, **Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.** His suffering and death encourages us as we run our race. When we suffer we fix our eyes on the one who suffered for us. His endurance leads us to endure our race. For the race begins and with him. And the award is eternal life with him forever.

This week we have the perfect opportunity to throw aside the things of this world that lead us away from Christ. And to fix our eyes on Jesus. Four worship services in four days! But let us not just fix your eyes on Jesus during Holy Week—or Christmas. Let's fix our eyes on Jesus throughout the year and our life. For the race doesn't end at Easter. The race lasts our whole life—the life that Jesus won for us.

The race of a Christian's life is not an easy one. It is a long and hard race. And there are many things along the way that try to take a focus off of Christ. So as we run we fix our eyes on Jesus. For the race begins and ends with him. And through him we have the victory. Amen.