

LET US FIX OUR EYES ON JESUS

Hebrews 12:1 - 13:25

Leading verse 12:2

"...fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.."

The Letter to the Hebrews was written between 60 and 70 A.D. for Jewish Christians who were being severely persecuted not only by the Romans but also by their own people. They bore many sufferings and afflictions for the name of Jesus. Therefore, some became despondent and challenged to deny God's grace and fall away from the faith. They allowed themselves to be irritated and seduced by some foreign teachings, which, unlike Jesus' teaching, promised a life without afflictions. But the author encouraged them from the broken shepherd's heart not to retreat, but to patiently hold on to their faith in Jesus, testifying to the nature and work of Jesus from chapter 1 to chapter 10 verse 18.

In chapters 12 and 13, he exhorts them not to miss God's redemptive grace and His magnificent blessing in the time of suffering through afflictions and to turn back to their old life, like Esau, but rather to accept God's chastening through persecutions and sufferings as His educating love and actively bear the reproach of Christ. In our time, too, many young Christians are seduced by the spirit of the age and its misguided teachings such as hedonism, postmodernism, selfishness and supposed freedom, that they reject the truth of eternal life and eventually backslide in faith. Today, therefore, let us personally hear and accept the author's earnest exhortations and encouragements to look up to Jesus. Through Jesus alone, we may continue to run with patience in the struggle of faith in the time of suffering and receive the promised and God's testimony.

I. Let us run with patience (12:1-29)

In the previous chapter 11, the writer introduced a number of numerous men and women of faith to encourage the Jewish Christians that in the midst of all the persecutions and temptations of the world, they too can run with patience in the struggle of faith and receive the victory crown of life in the eternal kingdom of God. They stood on shoulders of giants, all of whom received God's testimony through faith. (11,39)

Let us look at 12:1: "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." The Jewish Christians had already made a great faith decision to follow Jesus in all circumstances. (10:32) Out of love for God, they formed a strong and loving community of the Word of God. (6:10; 13:7, 17) As they worshiped Jesus and gave themselves for him out of pure love for him, they received true peace and exuberant joy in their new life, but at the same time they experienced much opprobrium and persecution for the sake of their faith in Jesus. These afflictions apparently did not cease, but became part of their life of faith. Then some became wavering and discouraged to hold on to their faith in Jesus. The writer, however, encouraged them to lay aside the sin that constantly ensnared them and everything that weighed them down in their faith walk,

and to continue with patience in the struggle that was destined for them. Some think that it would be impossible to separate from some sins. Some also think that some sufferings and afflictions would be too hard, so that they become fearful and despondent. How then can we lay aside everything that weighs us down in our race of faith and continue to run it patiently, even to the finish of our race?

Let's read 12:2: "fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God." The writer encouraged Jewish Christians to look not to themselves, to persecutors or to circumstances, but to Jesus alone during this turbulent time of suffering. The English translation says, "Fix your eyes on Jesus." To fix our eyes on Jesus, therefore, means to look intently at Jesus. Why should we fix our eyes on Jesus alone? Verse 2 says that Jesus is the beginner and perfecter of faith. Jesus is the beginner of faith because, humbling Himself endlessly, He became like us in everything and had to be tempted and suffer with us because of our sin, even though He was God Himself. (2:17) In order to help us and give us the new eternal life, he renounced all his heavenly glory and came into the world in human form so humbly through the obedience of faith to be like us in everything. Thus he fulfilled God's counsel. We did not come to faith by ourselves, but Jesus came into our hearts and gave us faith for our salvation.

Jesus is the perfecter of faith because he completed God's work of redemption once for all through his one-time sacrifice on the cross. In order to give us perfect cleansing of our conscience, perfect forgiveness and sanctification, he endured all contradictions against himself, and he paid little regard to unbearable pain and shame. Through this substitutionary death of Jesus on the Cross, we were allowed to receive perfect redemption and establish eternal love relationship with God. Through the power of Jesus' blood, we were allowed to be God's heirs and co-heirs with Christ once and for all, and to serve God in holiness and righteousness

throughout our lives without fear. Without this Jesus, we are drifting past the goal. Therefore, it is absolutely necessary to fix our gaze intently on Jesus and to run patiently to the finish of our race in the struggle that is destined for us, so that we may receive what has been promised, indeed enter the glorious kingdom of God.

Let's look again at verse 2b and also verse 3: "For the joy set before him he 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 sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart." To fix our eyes on Jesus is to look at how much Jesus suffered for our salvation and how patiently he fought for our salvation even to the point of death on the cross. Jesus humbled himself by coming down from heaven, giving up all his glory and sharing his life with filthy sinners. He healed the sin-sick and cast out evil spirits. He took twelve hopeless men and made them leaders for God's work of world salvation. Although he gave himself with the wailing shepherd's heart and with the vision of God for numerous helpless people, the religious leaders persecuted him and sought his life. The Jews, who were still cheering him with "Hosanna!" when he entered Jerusalem, were now shouting, "Crucify him! Crucify him!" They struck him on the face. They scourged and crucified him between two robbers. They tempted him to come down from the cross. But Jesus endured the cross. He held the shame in low esteem. Through all the suffering, Jesus accomplished our salvation. Praise Jesus, who ran his course of faith from beginning to end and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. There he now waits for all who believe in him and patiently run the race of faith to the final destination, to give them the glorious crown of righteousness.

The time of suffering is always a precious opportunity for us to look up to Jesus, who endured the cross to free us from our sin and give us eternal salvation. We may look up to Jesus by following him in his patient struggle of faith, patiently bearing all opposition and

shame. We may look up to Jesus by continuing to run with patience in the struggle of faith, always increasing in the work of the Lord. Then, like Apostle Paul, we too can testify, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day..." (2 Timothy 4:7, 8a) There are many examples of men and women of faith who looked up to Jesus in the midst of unbearable suffering and thus victoriously completed their walk of faith. Polycarp was one of the Church Fathers in the second century in Asia Minor. Many Christians at that time had been seduced because of Gnostic heresies and had fallen away from the faith. He struggled in the midst of persecution to bring Christians back to the right faith. He encouraged the church to keep the faith, to hold fast to the truth of the gospel of Jesus, no matter what the cost. He had to pay this price himself when he was arrested at the age of 86. Even on his way to the stake, he looked to Jesus and testified, "86 years I have served Jesus, and He has never done me any harm. How could I blaspheme my Lord and Savior!" There is another story of Perpetua and Felicitas. They were catechumens, that is, they were preparing for their baptism. At the age of 20, they died as martyrs in Carthage in the second century. After their conversion and during their preparation for baptism, they were accused and threatened with the death penalty. Perpetua's father visited them repeatedly to dissuade them from their faith and thus free them from prison. But they fought patiently for the crown of eternal life until they died by the sword in the arena. They received Revelation 2:10 as the promised thing: "Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you life as your victor's crown."

Thanks be to the Lord who helped us in the midst of trials and tribulations to look up to Jesus with 1 Peter 4:13 and rejoice that we were allowed to suffer with Him. God helped us not to be despondent, but to be spiritually equipped during this time through leadership seminars early in the morning. It was abundantly strengthening for us to have further

edifying fellowship through leadership seminars in the morning after the early morning prayer fellowship and to raise up the spiritual leaders. Our Lord Jesus gave us victory confidence to be more and more committed to the disciple-making work and the formation of spiritual leadership among the students and next generations. Our God encourages us again and again through His Word from the Letter to the Hebrews and Genesis to continue patiently in the midst of all injustices like our Lord Jesus in the struggle of faith for the mobilization of the Next Generation and students and for spiritual revival in Germany and Europe and to have God's promise from Ezekiel 37:10 fulfilled.

In 2018, I was privileged to enter into a blessed marriage of faith. I established this family with a promise before God to provide our house church for the world campus mission and next generation mission with Matthew 6:33. One year after marriage, I experienced the cunning attack of Satan that my wife demanded me to immediately leave the next generation mission that God had given us. This caused the painful separation and divorce. But I was allowed to remember Jesus, who endured so much opposition to Himself from sinners and held shame in low esteem in order to fulfill His mission to the end, to give His life for sinners. God gave me His grace to give my life in the midst of all the temptations of Satan, much rather than compromise under the guise of marriage of faith, for the mobilization of the next generation and for the disciple-making work among the young students. My Lord stood on my side in this storm of life, answered all my pleas, and helped me to look to Him and experience His victory against the power of sin and death. Praise the Lord who was with me and helped me overcome the deceitfulness of sin. He was and is always good. He used the temptation to raise me as a man of faith and to show me His absolute love. Jesus, who endured the cross and all opposition, gave me new courage and determination to continue to run together the race of faith for the heavenly calling with Deut. 6:5. It is God's counsel that I experience God's even more powerful

work among the next generation and receive the crown of righteousness.

Let's read 12:2 again, "fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God." God showed us His wonderful grace in using us as fighters of faith for the salvation of the students in this continent for the past 42 years. Let us also fix our eyes on Jesus in the next 40 years and continue to run with patience in the fight of faith that, in spite of the lies of the godless spirit of the age, in spite of the deceit of sin, through disciple making and the formation of 10,000 two-man Bible study teams, we may get the world campus mission fulfilled, starting from the 1700 universities of Europe.

In 12:4-11, the author further encourages them to patiently walk in faith by talking about the goal of the Tribulations. The time of suffering was a very good and important time for them. Why? Let us read 12:6, 7: "because the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and he chastens everyone he accepts as his son." Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as his children. For what children are not disciplined by their father?" They could be sure that their sufferings were the best proof that God loved them. God used their sufferings to raise them as His beloved children. There is a heart-touching story of Joseph. He had done nothing worse against his brothers, but they envied and hated him for selling him to Egypt. Yet in the midst of injustice and pain, he trusted God to absolutely love him, guide his life, and raise him to be one of the patriarchs of faith. He experienced God's guidance throughout his life as God raised him up to be a shepherd and a great salvation for his brothers, family and a great nation. William Carey, who is also called the father of modern missions, went to India as a missionary with the prayer of converting that country full of idolatry and superstition to God. In the process, he raised up many other missionaries and fearlessly preached the gospel. There he experienced

opposition from the entire Indian government. In addition, he suffered various illnesses and the death of his son. His wife threatened him with the knife to return to England. In this time of suffering, however, he trusted in God's love and counsel for his life, so that he testified: "This is the dark valley of death for me. Yet I rejoice that I may be here. For God is here." His faith in God's love and guidance in the midst of suffering helped him not only endure the challenge and pain, but also do great works of God such as translating the Bible into the languages of India. God encourage us to deeply receive God's educating love and guidance through sufferings. Our God will raise up each of us like Jesus as fighters of faith for His eternal work of salvation and write wonderful stories of faith through us in this summer term.

In 12:12-17, the author warns against considering this chastening and educating love of God frivolous in the midst of suffering. For this, he gives Esau's example, who considered the chastening and pain-bearing love frivolous. Esau became an apostate. In other Bible translations, he is called a fornicator. He rejected the firstborn blessing, exchanging God's grace for his greed for short-term pleasure when he grew weary. (Genesis 25:29-34) He thought life would be much nicer without God's chastening. But when he missed God's grace and His pain-bearing love, he was rejected. Like Esau, some Jewish Christians were on the verge of betraying God's grace. They had come to know the truth of perfect salvation through Jesus and had accepted Christ as their Lord. (10:32) But when, like Esau, they grew weary because of facing afflictions, the temptation was to return to their old life without Jesus and exchange God's blessings for their sinful desires. This would cause a bitter root to grow up and the whole church to become unclean. That is why the writer warned them not to miss out on all the grace and chastening love they had experienced so far in the time of temptation and be an apostate, like Esau, but to continue to form an influential holy community.

In the time of challenge, we may be careful that no one like Esau misses God's grace and His love. Let's read verse 14: "Make every effort to live in peace with everyone and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord." Pursuing peace with everyone does not mean tolerating everything the other person does or going along the path of compromise. It means encouraging and admonishing one another and forming the fellowship of love based on truth. It means not rejecting God's grace like Esau, but accepting God's nurture as His love in the midst of suffering and building sanctified fellowship of love based on God's grace. Then, even during afflictions, we can build a healthy and edifying community of life in God's peace and righteousness. Thus, in the midst of God's mighty work, the early Christians experienced God's peace despite harsh persecution. They were able, instead of retreating to their old lives, to strengthen their hands through loving and devoted life fellowship and be used as apostles of peace. It was the true strength and influence of the first Christians. God worked mightily through their heartfelt prayer vessel and through their loving fellowship so that the Word of God could continue to be freely proclaimed and Jesus' name could be witnessed even to the ends of the earth.

In 12:18-24, the author again reminds the Jewish Christians of what great grace they have received from God. By comparing the two mountains, he contrasts the law under the old covenant with grace under the new covenant. The law made it obvious that no one is able to save himself by his own power and merit because of sin. Even if an animal touched the mountain of God, it was to be stoned. That is why the Israelites were very afraid to approach God at Mount Sinai. But the Jewish Christians, by the unilateral grace of God through Jesus' substitutionary death on the cross, were allowed to come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem. Let's look at verse 24: "...to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel." It was Jesus alone through whom the Jewish Christians

were allowed to enter into the new covenant and receive God's wonderful forgiveness grace. Through the blood of sprinkling they received complete cleansing from their sins. This was not all. Let us look at 12:25-29. An unshakable kingdom awaited them. Let's read 12:28: "Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe." Because of the grace of redemption and the blessing of the unshakable kingdom of God, they were allowed to be thankful and serve God with timidity and fear in the midst of afflictions.

Thanks be to the Lord for encouraging and exhorting us in chapter 12 to always fix our eyes on Jesus in our struggle of faith, accepting all afflictions and all contradictions as His chastening love, and with patience victoriously running the race of faith for spiritual revival in Europe. Let us gratefully accept God's love and guidance in the time of suffering and strengthen our hands for influential life fellowship and disciple making so that our God may use Germany as a shepherd nation and Europe as a kingdom of priests.

II. Let us bear the disgrace of Christ (13:1-25)

In 13:1-18 the author gives final exhortations for their practical life of faith, that they might overcome all afflictions and temptations and form influential sanctified community of love. It is about our relationship with each other. He strongly and repeatedly exhorts and encourages us to stand firm in brotherly love, to be hospitable, to remember the captives, to cherish marriage, and to guard against greed for money. (1-6) It is also about our attitude toward our teachers, that we follow and obey their faith in Jesus and their example of faith, as they carefully watch over our souls. (7.17)

Above all, it is about our attitude toward Jesus' suffering and especially his shame. The writer again exhorts and encourages us to love Jesus' shame and to follow him in his suffering. Let us read 13:13: "Let us, then, go to him outside the camp, bearing the disgrace he bore." The bodies of the animals

whose blood was brought into the sanctuary by the high priest as an offering for sin were burned outside the camp. In the same way, Jesus was crucified outside the holy city of Jerusalem at Golgotha. Thus, he was shamefully excluded from the holy community. We find the purpose for Jesus' suffering outside the gate in verse 12: "...to make the people holy through his own blood." Because Jesus bore the shame, we were allowed to be washed clean of all transgressions and sins once and for all. Because Jesus bore the shame, we were allowed to receive God's perfect sanctification and redemption. Because of Christ's shame, God no longer wants to remember our sin and unrighteousness. Because of this example of Jesus, numerous men and women of faith also love the disgrace of Jesus and serve God's heavenly calling steadfastly, bearing the hatred of the world patiently.

As an example of going out of the camp, we can consider the man born blind in John chapter 9. He experienced the great grace of God in that Jesus made him see. Shortly after this mighty saving work of God, he experienced the cunning challenge from the neighbors and Pharisees. He also received no support from his parents. Nevertheless, the healed man testified to Jesus' saving work without fear, accepting all personal disadvantages. The more he witnessed to Jesus, the harsher the persecution became that he was finally expelled from the synagogue. But Jesus, who was also cast out by his own people, found the healed man and made him blessed. Going out to Jesus and bearing his reproach makes our lives truly blessed.

Watchman Nee, who was a Chinese preacher in the 20th century and had to stay in prison for the last 20 years of his life, experienced the Chinese government's harsh persecution against the Christian church in China. Anyone who did not submit to the Communist Party was considered an "enemy of the people." Watchman Nee decided to be one of these "enemies of the people." So he learned to go out to Jesus from the camp and bear his shame. He devoted all his strength

to Bible study and planted many influential churches. Despite the threats from the communists, he did not give up his work and spiritual struggle of faith as a preacher and evangelist. Due to many false accusations, he was convicted and had to stay in prison for 20 years. Was his 20-year imprisonment a wasted time? Was it in vain that he bore the shame of Christ? No, his patient suffering in love for the disgrace of Christ Jesus was spread all over the world that numerous Christians all over the world were encouraged not to go with the flow of the spirit of the times but to bear the disgrace of Jesus. Let us also resolutely bear the disgrace of Jesus on campus as Bible teachers that the revival work is being prepared in Europe. Let us serve the disciple-making ministry fruitfully and influentially without fear and, whatever the cost. As Jesus was shamefully executed outside the camp, let us also much rather bear all the disgrace of Jesus and walk faithfully and patiently in his footsteps of faith and receive the crown of righteousness.

Further, the writer exhorts us in verses 15 and 16: "Through him, therefore, let us always offer to God the sacrifice of praise, which is the fruit of lips that confess his name. Doing good and sharing with others do not forget, for such sacrifices please God." We were allowed to know through the Epistle to the Hebrews as a whole that Jesus entered the sanctuary as our only true and eternal High Priest to purchase an eternal redemption for us. (9:12) Now the writer concludes that because of God's grace through Jesus' one-time sacrifice for our redemption, we may offer the sacrifice of praise to God at all times. These are not bloody animal sacrifices like those under the old covenant, but songs of thanksgiving according to the new covenant that come from our hearts and our gratitude for God's wonderful grace. The author encourages us through chapters 12 and 13 to participate with joy and great gratitude in the suffering and shame of Jesus. Let us always renew God's wonderful grace and praise God at all times out of our great gratitude, for we have reason to praise God: Such sacrifices please God. "Praise and thanksgiving, praise and thanksgiving, praise and

thanksgiving! God's children always say praise and thanks! Every woe became good, through the Savior's blood. Praise and thanksgiving, praise and thanksgiving, praise and thanksgiving! God's children always say praise and thanks!"

Today we have come to know Jesus as the beginner and perfecter of faith. He endured the cross and fought sin to the death. In our struggle of faith, may we always look to this Jesus and follow Him, patiently bearing the shame of Christ and the cross of God's mission for the World Campus Mission according to His example. God lead each of you, like our Lord Jesus, in the time of tribulations and suffering, to write wonderful stories of faith and praise Him and His grace at all times. God will surely revive Europe spiritually and bless each of you with the crown of victory from the hand of our Lord Jesus.

Let's read 12:2: "...fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God."