

**HEBREWS 41
(Hebrews 12:1-3)**

**OPENING THE EYES OF FAITH
By Ron Harvey
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INTRODUCTION

We have seen in the first ten chapters of Hebrews the reason why we believe in Jesus. He is a magnificent Savior. He is a better deliverer than Moses. He is a better captain than Joshua. He is a better priest than Aaron. His sacrifice of himself is a better sacrifice than the sacrifice of animals. And we have seen countless reasons why it is necessary to believe in Him.

We learned that there was no salvation in all the types, but there is salvation in Jesus Christ.

The book of Hebrews has taught us that it is absolutely crucial that we cast all of our confidence in Jesus Christ. It is him who will ultimately deliver us from our sin. It is Jesus who will finally deliver us from all our troubles. It is Jesus who will deliver us from our own sinful nature. And it is our Savior, Jesus Christ, who will usher us into a heavenly rest that defies all description.

Why must we cast our faith in Jesus Christ? It is because there is no one else in all the world who can save us. From all eternity, it was Jesus who was ordained to be a Savior. It was not Moses. It was not Joshua. It was not Abraham. It was not David. But it was always Jesus.

Jesus was ordained from all eternity to be our priest. It was not the Levitical priests who would stand in our stead. It was not even Melchisedec who was of a higher order of priests than the Levites. But it was Jesus who was ordained from all eternity to be our great high priest. It is Jesus Christ who stands between a holy God and a sinful man and offers his righteousness on behalf of the sinner.

Now if Jesus Christ is all of that, then the greatest duty in our life is to put our faith and confidence in the Lord Jesus Christ. Our greatest duty is not to be a good person. Our greatest duty is not to climb the ranks in

religion. Our greatest duty is not to win the world to Christ. But our first and greatest duty is to believe in the words and work of our Savior. For this is salvation. It is simple, childlike faith in Him.

Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved.

Now when we came to Hebrews chapter 11 we found that true godly faith is believing what God has said. Faith is not a wishing well where you are granted one wish. Faith is not wishing upon a star. Faith is not a magic wand whereby you may have anything you desire. Faith is not a mechanism by which you can pull the strings and make God do tricks for you.

But true faith is believing what God has said. And in chapter 11 we found that when you believe what God says, then you will act accordingly.

The Old Testament is full of examples of those who believed God when God spoke.

1. Able believed God and so he brought an appropriate sacrifice.
2. Enoch believed God and so he walked with God and was translated directly to heaven.
3. Noah believed God and so he picked up a hammer and built an ark.
4. Abraham believed God, so he left his country and his kindred and wandered in a land that God promised him.
5. Isaac believed God, so he blessed Jacob over Esau.
6. Jacob believed God, so he blessed Manassah over Ephraim.
7. Joseph believed God, so he requested that his bones be taken out of Egypt and buried in Canaan.
8. Moses parents believed God, so they took measures to hide Moses from the king.
9. Moses himself believed God, so he:
 - a. Renounced his status as the son of Pharoah's daughter.
 - b. Renounced the pleasures of Egypt.
 - c. Chose rather to suffer affliction with the people of God.
10. Joshua believed God, so he followed God's directions and the walls of Jericho came tumbling down.
11. Rahab believed God and so she hid the spies and by faith she hung

the scarlet thread in her window and she was saved.

12. Gideon. Gideon defeated the hosts of Midian even though God had whittled his army down to 300 men.

13. Samson. He killed hundreds of Philistines with the jawbone of an ass.

14. David. He killed Goliath with one stone.

On and on it goes. Men and women in the Old Testament believed God and their accomplishments are recorded in the Scriptures.

All the things that were accomplished through faith

Starting in verse 11:33,

1. They subdued kingdoms by faith.
2. They set up righteous governments by faith.
3. They stopped the mouths of lions by faith,
4. They quenched raging fire by faith.
5. They escaped the edge of the sword by faith.

Now if you read up through the first sentence of verse 35 you might think that believing God is all glamour and honor and fame and success in this life. And this is what many people are looking for when they seek out God. Perhaps they want victories in this life. Perhaps they look for God to give them a financial windfall. Maybe they are looking for a genie in a bottle who will grant their every wish. But if you read to the end of chapter 11 you will find that it may not always be a bed of roses in the Christian life.

Look in verse 35.

Others were tortured.

Now that doesn't seem like the victorious Christian life, does it? That

is not the fame and honor and comforts that many have in mind when they come to God.

Many of God's faithful were called on to endure cruel mocking and scourging. They literally had the flesh ripped off their backs and were beaten just short of death. And because of faith, they did not accept deliverance from the affliction.

Many of God's faithful were imprisoned for the sake of Christ. (v.36) Others were stoned to death. Some were sawn in two. Some were killed with the sword. Others were denied the necessities of life because of their faith and they wandered about being destitute and afflicted and they lived in dens and caves.

And God's faithful in all ages have endured great hardships in this life and they have done so because they believed in the promises of God. All of these suffering saints willingly accepted suffering in this life because they believed that there was a better day coming in heaven.

We have learned in Hebrews that the great and wonderful promises of God have their ultimate fulfillment not in this life, but in the life to come. Anyone who puts their roots down in this world and who lives only for fulfillment in this life is not worthy of the heavenly promises to come.

Abraham was a sojourner in the land of Canaan because he looked for a city that had foundations, whose builder and maker was God.

Those who have believed in God in times past always looked for a heavenly redemption. And therefore they endured hardship here on earth, having a certain hope of joy and comfort in heaven.

And now we come to chapter 12.

Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us. Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith . . . (vs.1, 2)

If you look closely at these two verses you will notice that there is an emphasis on seeing something. It says in verse one, "Wherefore seeing."

And in verse two it says, "Looking unto Jesus." And these two verses are instructing us to open our eyes of faith and take stock of things around you so that you can live your Christian life with maximum effectiveness and with maximum encouragement.

And so, I have titled the message this morning, Opening the Eyes of Faith.

Now I want you to notice here in verse one that the life of the faithful is described as a race. It says,

Let us run with patience the race that is set before us.

Now if you are a sportsman, this analogy will probably appeal to you. The Christian life is pictured here as a race taking place in a great coliseum. Perhaps what is in view here is the Greek Coliseum where they had the athletic games and contests. And the picture that we have in verse one is a picture of Christians lining up at the starting line to run a race.

Now in these early games in Greece, the race that was the biggest race of the games was not the 100 yard dash. Rather, it was the marathon. The marathon was the race that generated all the excitement there.

And in verse one, the faithful in Christ Jesus are lined up at the starting line to begin the marathon of the Christian life. Now this race is not a sprint. The victory will not go to the one who runs the fastest for the first 10 seconds. The race is a very long race. This race will take a lifetime to run.

And as the faithful stand on the starting line, they are encouraged to open their eyes and look by faith at four things. And that will be the outline of the message this morning. They are told to look out and see,

1. The course that is set before them.
2. The cloud of witnesses that is encompassed about them.
3. The weights and sins that might hold them back.
4. And lastly, they are encouraged to lift up their eyes of faith and consider the greatest runner who ever ran the course. And of course, that great runner is Jesus Christ himself.

Now the first thing that we should consider is the race course itself.

The Course that is Set Before Them

It says in verse one that we are to run,

The race that is set before us.

And so, the runners look out and they see hurdles along the way. They see hills that must be climbed. They see valleys that must be crossed. And then, they also know that there are many obstacles out there which they cannot see from the starting line. And from the starting line, the race course seems like a very imposing monster. It will require all of the strength and all of the endurance that they can muster.

In many ways, the Christian life is a long, long journey. It is a journey from point A to point Z. We are leaving Egypt and we are on our way to Canaan. And there are obstacles all along the way. Our faith will be tested from the beginning to the end. And let me warn you, there will be many who will abandon the faith along the way.

Many will only get a few steps along the Christian pathway and they will realize right away that the path is strewn with too many obstacles. The hardships are too severe. And they will quickly drop out of the race and turn back to the way of the world. And that will prove that they had no faith at all.

Many will run the race for a time, but when it gets too hard, they will complain and murmur against God like the children of Israel did in the wilderness. And they will never reach the Promised Land because of unbelief.

Ah, but the faithful, will run the full course. When the Red Sea looms ahead of them, they will wait on the Lord to part the Sea. When they thirst in the desert, they will depend on the Lord to quench their thirst. When they are hungry along the way, they will ask of the Lord's hand. And they will run the race from the beginning to the end.

This will be your greatest duty - to trust the Lord Jesus all along the way. No matter what lies ahead in the race course of life, you must lay your life in the hands of Christ.

So if you are on the starting line or even if you are almost to the finish line, it will be helpful to you if you keep your eyes on the course.

Look up here just ahead. Someone is about to hurt your feelings. And then around the corner there is a time of sickness and physical suffering. And then, just when you think it is clear sailing, disappointment will come your way. Today there may be good weather, but tomorrow it may be stormy.

So, keep your eyes peeled ahead and watch the course that is set before you and know that there will be bumps along the way.

When Paul was about to be killed, he wrote to Timothy and this is what Paul said,

For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought the good fight, I have finished my course. I have kept the faith.

II Timothy 4:6, 7

You see how Paul equates finishing the course to keeping the faith.

I have finished my course. I have kept the faith.

And when you get to those final moments of your life, this must be your final words as well, for he that does not finish the course, has abandoned the faith.

And so, when we stand at the starting line, we see first of all the course that is set before us. And I pray that you will not be misled. It is a hard course and it is a long course and it is a dangerous course. And it is a course that will tempt you to quit the race.

The Cloud of Witnesses that is Encircled About Them

But I would have you notice also, that when you stand at the starting line you should not only take notice of the course before you, but you should also gaze around the coliseum and see all those who have gone before you and who figuratively are rooting for you.

Now you will not be running your Christian race alone. But there will be thousands and thousands of former runners sitting in the arena and cheering wildly for you. These are those who have already run the course and who have proven that it can be completed by faith.

Wherefore, seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses . . .

This suggests that as you stand at the starting line of the Christian race, you should look up in the stands. Notice it says, "Seeing."

You should not put blinders on to run the race, but you should open your eyes and look around the Coliseum and see. It is a good idea to look often up into the farthest corners of the arena. For there you will find great encouragement for your race.

You will notice that there are spectators seated all around you, for it says,

We are compassed about with witnesses.

If you look to your right, you will see Abel, the one who brought the correct sacrifice. And you will see Enoch who walked with God and was translated. And you will see Noah who built an ark.

All of these ran the race many years ago, and by believing God, they finished the race successfully.

And then look to your left, on the other side of the arena, and there you will see Abraham and by his side there is faithful Sarah. And near to them is Isaac and Jacob and Joseph.

And each one of them by faith finished the course four thousand years ago.

And then look behind you, there is Moses and Gideon and Rahab and Samson. And they also have finished the course by faith.

You should look around the whole Coliseum and there are hundreds of thousands of the faithful who have run the course by faith. And all of

these serve as examples for you.

If they endured all things and were able to finish the course by faith, then you shall as well.

Now this is an analogy that the writer of Hebrews uses here to show us that all those who have gone before have successfully run the race and their example is for our encouragement.

How would you feel if you were the first ever to run the race? Why you would be trembling in your boots, because you would not know whether or not it was even possible. But now that you have seen so many who have successfully completed the course, you know that you can make it too.

Some people ask, “Are they really watching us?” In the analogy it seems that they are spectators. But in reality, I think the instruction here is that they serve as examples for us. We are instructed to look at them! And that is the focus of this verse. We are to be aware of their example. And this should encourage us in our race.

And I am sure that in some way, because they are interested in the glory of Christ and the ultimate success of all the elect, they are passionately rooting for us to make it. And when we stumble, we should feel them pulling for us and rooting for us to get up and go on.

Example: You know, ball teams fight hard all year long to gain home court advantage for the playoffs. And they do this because there is great advantage and energy to be gained from the fans who support them and root them on.

And each of us should have a sense that God himself is interested in our race and that all of the faithful of all ages are rooting for us along the way.

And so, when we begin the race, we are to see that we are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses.

It says that we are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses. And what does it mean when it says a “cloud” of witnesses.

This word speaks to the number of witnesses. It is a vast number. They are so vast that when they assemble together, they are a cloud that fills the arena.

And notice is a great cloud of witnesses. It must be millions who have gone before us.

And it is even more than that, for it says we are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses.

Know for a certainty that you are not alone in your difficult race.

Now we have seen that the one who runs the Christian race should see the course; they should look up into the arena and see the witnesses who have previously completed the race; and next, they should look at themselves.

Let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us.

When the runner prepares for the race, he must check himself out. He must submit himself for inspection. And if there is anything that would hold him back, then he must be careful to discard it.

Example: Now what would you think about a runner who came to the starting line with weights strapped to his ankles?

Why, that would be very foolish.

Every runner in a race strips himself of every needless weight. These days, runners have the most streamlined uniforms. They are lightweight and aerodynamic. Even their shoes are the lightest material. And that is because nothing matters except winning the race.

And our Christian life is much the same way. There are many things that may impede our progress along the pilgrim pathway.

Now some of the things that may impede you are not necessarily sinful things in themselves. They may just be things that weigh you down

so that you cannot run the race well.

If you are burdened down with financial responsibilities, sometimes that can interfere with your ability to perform your spiritual calling. And so, perhaps it is a wise thing to shed some weight.

Some people may be burdened down with former habits which are not productive in the Christian life.

Whatever the excess weight is in your life, it may be a good idea to shed some of the excess poundage so that you can run the race more effectively.

And the writer of Hebrews says,

Let us lay aside every weight.

Now only you know what it is that weighs you down and if the weight is not helpful in the Christian walk, then it should be laid aside.

Now some of you ladies may be saying, “My husband drags me down pretty good. I think I could do serve the Lord better if I cut him loose.”

But here in Hebrews we are not talking about shirking our personal responsibilities. One of the chief duties of a wife is to put up with her husband. So, we are not talking about shedding that kind of weight. We are talking about shedding weight that is incidental and not useful.

Even more important than shedding excess incidental baggage is laying aside sin.

Let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us.

It is sin that principally slows down or impedes the Christian in the spiritual race. And so, every sin should be laid aside. This is one of the most difficult and also one of the most important tasks for every believer – it is to lay aside sin.

The Bible teaches that the flesh lusteth against the Spirit and the

Spirit against the flesh. And the two are opposed to each other. And so, we must always be examining ourselves. We must open up our eyes and look at ourselves. And when we see sin, and we surely will see it, then we must lay it aside.

Sin is the most dangerous enemy that you will encounter in the race. It is a heavy weight around your neck. And you must be willing to open your eyes and see it. And when you see it, you must be willing to lay it aside.

Now unbelievers are never able to lay sin aside; it is an impossibility for them, for they do not have a new nature. However, if you are a true believer, then you do have a new nature and that new nature is not in bondage to sin. And you have the ability both to see your sin and to lay it aside.

Let me hurry on now to the last point of the message and that is that,

We are to look upon our great example.

For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds.

When your trials seem too hard and when the race seems too long and too difficult, then lift up your eyes and see the greatest example of all – the Lord Jesus Christ.

All of these faithful ones of the past are good examples for us. We are encouraged to know that they finished the race. But our greatest example of all is the One who ran the perfect race. It is the One who set the record that will never be broken. It is the record of perfection. It is the One who prevailed though he suffered more than any man. It is the One who drank the cup of sorrows. It is the One who resisted all temptations and verse four suggests that he resisted even unto blood.

His race was the most difficult of all. His course was the most difficult one. Our course is but a fraction of the difficulty of his course. And yet he ran his race and finished his course. And he also did it by faith.

May I suggest to you that when Jesus came to this world, he emptied himself and he lived his life with absolute faith in God the Father. Jesus

was a real man and he ran a real race. And he ran his race every day by faith. Jesus said, "Not my will, but thine be done," because he believed the Father.

And Jesus is our great example. When we are wearied and about ready to faint, then it is advisable to consider Jesus who endured all things.

Oh, that we might be more like Him in times of trouble. And so it says,

Consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself.

CONCLUSION

Let me summarize the message this morning. We are in a race. And it is helpful if we run this race with our eyes open.

1. Look out at the course that is set before you. Know that it is a challenging course. Know that there are trials along the way. Know that there are hurdles to be cleared and hills to be climbed. Don't blindly begin your race thinking that it will always be flat terrain ahead. But choose to run the race knowing there will be great challenges to your faith. And if you have inspected the course before you begin, you will be better prepared to meet those challenges.
2. Run your race with the knowledge that thousands of the faithful have preceded you and were successful. You will complete your course if you keep the faith. It is only by faith that this course can be completed. The moment you abandon Christ, then the race is over and you have lost. But if nothing shakes you from Him, then the race will be won in the end.
3. It will be very helpful to you if you will examine yourself and lay aside every weight, especially the sin that so easily besets you. Lingering sin will weigh you down and you will find it very difficult to finish the race. The danger is that you may decide that you prefer your sin to faith in Christ. And because you prefer your sin, you may let loose of your faith in Him and the race will be over for you.
4. Lastly, it is most helpful to keep your eyes open and focused on Jesus Christ himself. He showed the way and it is the way of faith. It is the

way of total dependence and confidence in the faithfulness of God to bring you through. Jesus endured every indignity and every hardship even unto death. And when he had passed every test, he cried, "It is finished."

And one day, death will come calling on you, and you will say with Paul, "I have fought the good fight. I have finished the course. I have kept the faith."

May God help us all to run the race and to run it with great endurance by unfailing faith in our God.