

Fixing our eyes on Jesus - Rev Donald Morrison (Retired)

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Date: 31 May 2026

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[0 : 00] Let us for a while turn back to the latter part of the passage of Scripture we read in Hebrews chapter 12.!

Who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

Let us also lay aside every weight and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us. And like the other New Testament letters, this one is anonymous, at least to us, because the author at the beginning does not identify himself, as was the custom in those days.

If you look at all the other epistles, the other letters in the New Testament, and at the very beginning you will find that the author is revealing themselves.

Paul, an apostle of the Lord, Peter, an apostle, and writing to various people in various parts of what was then the eastern provinces of the Roman Empire.

[1 : 29] Many people believe that Paul wrote it, and when I was at the Free Church College many years ago, one of the tasks we were given to write an essay was to try to show whether Paul was the writer of Hebrews or whether it was somebody else, somebody anonymous.

But whether it was Paul or whether it was somebody else, the writer was obviously concerned about the Jews. It was a letter primarily written to the Jewish believers, those who had embraced the Lord Jesus Christ, but who now, for whatever reason, were turning back to their old legal ways, trying to keep the law of God as well as putting their faith and trust in the Lord Jesus.

And if you read through the New Testament, you will find that you cannot bring the two together, because the law has been done away. It was fulfilled by the life and by the death and by the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The fact that it might be Paul who wrote the letter, we might think of the letter to the Galatians, where Paul was chastising the Galatians because they were going back to law-keeping, that wherever Paul went, he was being dogged by Jewish believers, by Pharisaic men who were trying to persuade the new converts within the Gentile world that they had to keep the law of Moses as well as putting their trust and their faith in the Lord Jesus.

And this maddened Paul. And so in the letter to Galatians, you see how angry he was at these people trying to synthesise, as it were, these two very different beliefs.

[3 : 19] Verse chapter 10 shows that the law was but a shadow of the reality which was to come, the reality being the life of Jesus.

And verse 12 of chapter 10 clearly states the eternal value of his sacrifice. It need never be repeated. Remember that every year at Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, the great high priest, I don't know if he was great, but the high priest would go in behind that temple curtain and there he would sprinkle the blood of a sacrifice on the atonement cover.

And by doing that, God promised that all the sins of the nation that took place over the previous year, an uncountable number of sins would be cleansed.

And so as it were, they were starting the year on a fresh footing. You know, all the sins of the past year have been forgiven because of the actions of the high priest going in behind the curtain and doing so according to the law of Moses.

But it was repeated every single year. But when Jesus died on the cross, when he made that cry, cry it is finished, tetelestai, then we read in Matthew that the great curtain that hung down in front of the inner sanctuary was torn asunder from top to bottom.

[4 : 50] It was a very tall curtain and it was torn asunder from top to bottom, indicating that this was a work of the Lord, that he himself had ripped it apart.

And showing that from that moment on, access to the presence of God was open to everyone and anybody who would come. But they had to come via the person of Jesus and via the sacrifice that he had endured on the cross.

We read there in chapter 10, verse 14, because by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy. And so we might ask ourselves, when you come to know the Lord Jesus Christ, why would you want to go back into the shadows of the Old Testament legalism when you have the reality which is none other than the Lord Jesus Christ himself?

And the modern equivalent, if there is a modern equivalent, perhaps of those who might think that, yes, I'm going to believe in Jesus, but I'm also trusting in my own good deeds.

And if I'm trusting in my own good deeds, my giving to charity, the way I treat my neighbors and going regularly to church, then why do I need a Savior? The I'm as good as you syndrome.

[6 : 11] But it's because they're also as bad as the Lord's people, that they need a Savior. Good, righteous people do not need a Savior. The Savior has come for those who are unrighteous, and that includes absolutely everybody, because we know that there is none righteous, none at all naturally inherently righteous, except Christ Jesus himself.

And unless people come to see their need of Jesus, then all the law-keeping in the world will not keep them from a lost eternity. And so in the light of their new freedom in Christ, the Hebrew Christians were being encouraged to persevere in their new faith, not to go back to law-keeping. They were encouraged to spur one another on, but to love and good deeds, as we read in chapter 10, verse 24. And then again, let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another.

When I was a minister in Loch Gilberth, there seemed to be quite a lot of churches in the area, and no church is perfect. We know that. No church is perfect.

And there was one man I got to know within the locality, and he would go to one church, and after a short while, he and his wife would go to another church, and they were never satisfied with what they heard or what they saw.

[7 : 41] And I remember when I was introduced to him shortly after I went to Loch Gilberth, he said about the free church, oh, you're very good at funerals, but not much else. And a rather cynical kind of man.

And he just ended up worshipping at home. He would tune in to some perfect church down in Sussex somewhere, and he and his wife would be worshipping with them rather than worshipping in one of the local churches where the gospel was being preached in the Baptist church and hopefully in our own church and in some of the church of Scotland's.

And yet he was disobedient. So what we read here in Hebrews, he was not meeting together with other believers, and so they were worshipping by themselves, as it were, with people that they didn't know way down in England.

And meeting together is a very integral part of being a Christian. We are Christians. We're not isolated individuals. We are a church, and the word church speaks of a collective.

We're people who come together. And I'm sure you're all familiar with that old analogy which Mr. Macmillan years ago used to quote quite often about the coals glowing in the brazier.

[9 : 04] And if you were to take one of those coals out and put it down on the hearth, then it would cease to glow because it had been detached from the rest of the coals. It would close in the brazier, but pick it up and put it back in the brazier, and it would begin to glow again.

And so here in chapter 11, one of my favorite passages of Scripture, it's more than just an interesting list of names. It's a reminder of perseverance under pressure because all the names mentioned in chapter 11 are of believers in God who suffered one way or another, sometimes grievously for their faith.

They persevered. They did not lose their faith. They were looking ahead to the promises that God had given them. They didn't see the fulfillment of those promises because as we read at the end of chapter 11, all these, though commended through their faith, did not receive what was promised since God had provided something better for us that apart from us they should not be made perfect. And so these Old Testament saints, they were looking ahead. They didn't see the details that we have. We look back and we can see so much more than they saw.

We have all the details given to us in the New Testament. And we can see as we go back into the Old Testament that it is the light of the new that unlocks the mysteries that we find right the way through the Old Testament.

[10:42] And of course, Jesus, when he was on the road to Emmaus and he met with the two disciples, Cleopas and his companion, he unlocked the secret of the Old Testament scriptures, which is Jesus himself, that everything written in the Old Testament found its fulfillment in Christ himself.

And the Old Testament believers, although they didn't see the details that we have because they considered him faithful, who had made the promise, then that was enough for them.

They believed because they trusted in God. They were saved by faith alone. We often imagine that the Old Testament saints were somehow saved because of their adherence to the law of Moses, but they were saved by faith alone, just as we today are saved by faith alone.

But their faith was in the faithfulness of the one who had given them the promises. Their faith had an object. I remember years ago, somebody was discussing religion with me and he said, it must be great to have faith.

Well, at this very moment in time, there are tens, if not hundreds of millions of people all over the world who have faith. But faith is nothing without an object.

[12:00] It's the object of our faith that is important. It's the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. Faith by itself has to have an object and we are trusting in Jesus.

And our faith is also in the faithfulness of the one who has promised to us. They looked ahead and we look back, focusing together on the cross and upon the empty tomb.

The testimony of God's faithfulness, both to them and to us. But although we have so much more knowledge than they, we have the New Testament witness, we still need the same degree of faith. And where in the Bible would you find a greater degree of faith than this roll call of the Old Testament saints in Hebrews chapter 11? We read at the very beginning of chapter 11 that the ancients were commended for their faith.

And I wonder, will the Lord commend also for our faith, just as he commended them and as he commended the Roman centurion when Jesus said, even in Israel, I have not seen evidence of such faith.

[13:14] The woman who came through the crowd and touched the hem of the garment of Jesus, having been suffering, bleeding for 12 years and through faith, she was healed and Jesus commended her for her faith.

The woman who poured perfume over his feet and the woman who poured perfume over his head as we were looking at a few weeks ago. And little tree-climbing Zacchaeus who stood up and announced that he was changing his ways because he had now come to put his faith in Jesus. And the writer here in this letter likens the Christian life to a race. The track has been laid out. It's been marked out before us. We can see the finishing line and we're urged to keep our eyes fixed on it.

We are to throw off everything it hinders and the sin so easily tangles and we are urged to run with perseverance. And we are encouraged because we do not run alone.

We read here at the beginning of chapter 12, Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and sin which clings so closely and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us.

[14:37] And this cloud of witnesses that he refers to, recorded for us here in chapter 11, They have run their race. They have received the baton from those who came before them and they have passed the baton on to those who came after them.

And in a sense, metaphorically speaking, they are urging us on because we are following in their footsteps. They've already received the victor's garland.

They're now in glory and they're urging us on to the finish line. And every race has a prize. Every race has a prize.

I remember my sons, they went to a primary school not far from Inverness, but the headmistress didn't believe in competitions. Although they did have a sports day, there were no prizes.

She didn't want one person to have a prize at the expense of somebody else. But there's always going to be a loser, isn't there? If you have a race with two people, one's going to win and the other's going to lose.

[15 : 39] So we might ask ourselves if we're talking here about a race, then what is the prize? Well, the prize is glory. The prize is to be welcomed into heaven as a son or daughter, to be welcomed home by the one who loved us and who gave himself for us, as Paul so eloquently puts it.

Jesus himself, who is seated at the place of honor, at the right hand of God the Father. And Jesus himself is the prize, the pearl of great price.

Jesus, whom to know, is eternal life and who is the example we are to follow. And as Peter himself, when he stepped out of the boat, would say, when we look away from Jesus, then fear can set in. And when we do look away from Jesus, when we're embarking on the risks in his service, if we look away from Jesus, weariness can set in, despair can overcome us.

When we look at the waves of adversity beating around us, which seem so powerful and overwhelming, we can easily lose heart. And so the antidote is to look to Jesus, to keep our eyes fixed on Jesus.

[16 : 55] Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, the one who has gone before us preparing the way, the one who has blazed a trail of light through the darkness of this sin-sick world so that we might follow him along that narrow path.

So what was we read here about the joy that was set before Jesus, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

And what was the joy that was set before him? Well, there was the joy of completing the work that the Father gave him to do in his prayer on the night before he went to the cross.

He said, Father, I have completed the work you have given me to do. Well, we might say, well, he hadn't quite finished it because it would only be finished on the following day.

But the fact that Jesus had gone to Jerusalem, the fact that he had set his fist like flint, the fact that he would not be turned to one side or the other knowing what awaited him there, the fact that he was going to be obedient to what he had covenanted with the Father and the Holy Spirit in eternity to do in the point of time.

[18 : 19] It was the joy of completing the work that he had covenanted to do with his Father, the joy of being exalted to the highest place, the joy of being given the name that is above every name, and the joy of bringing glory to his Father.

But perhaps the greatest joy of all was to see men and women being released from their prison cells of being brought into the glorious light and liberty of knowing Christ Jesus himself as their Saviour and Lord.

The joy of throwing open the prison gates, the joy of leading into the glorious light and liberty of freedom men, women, and boys and girls whom Satan had long held captive.

And I wonder, has Jesus had caused to rejoice over us gathered here this evening in Barvis, that we have been released from our prison cells, that Satan no longer holds us captive, but we have been set free, and we're now being held in the safest place of all, the hand of the Lord Jesus.

His joy at having overcome sin and death by his own death on the cross, the joy of seeing the eyes of the blind being opened, the ears of the deaf unstopped, to see the lame leap like a deer, to hear the mute tongue shout for joy, to see water gushing in the wilderness and streams in the desert, to see gladness and joy overtaking his people, and to see sorrow and sighing flee away.

[20 : 02] Many of you will remember my late brother-in-law, Norman, who ended up in a wheelchair following a car accident many years ago, and my father-in-law, one of his favorite passages of scripture, speaks of, in Isaiah, about the lame shall leap like an hart, as it's put in the Old Testament, the Old English of the King James, Norman himself, the son, who had a broken body, was confined into a wheelchair.

Well, he passed from this world many years ago, and he is now in heaven, we believe, leaping like the deer, just as according to the scripture.

The joy and satisfaction, that is, belongs to Jesus, because as a result of the suffering of his soul, the travail of his soul, he's able to look with satisfaction on a multitude of redeemed sinners, so great a number that no one can count them, as we read in Revelation chapter 7.

But Jesus knows them all by name. He loves each and every one of them, and as I've said before, he suffered as much for the one as he did for the other.

The Lord's people are precious to him, and we must never, ever forget that, that if we are numbered amongst the Lord's people tonight, then we are precious in his sight.

[21 : 29] That great cloud of witnesses that is recorded for us here, well, the great cloud of witnesses that we read about in Revelation chapter 7 includes all those named here in chapter 11 of Hebrews, but it also includes many people that we knew personally in our own relatively short lives, men and women who have gone on before us, men and women who passed on to us the baton of faith, who prayed for us, who encouraged us, who were so instrumental on we ourselves coming to a living faith.

The great cloud of witnesses who have already run the race that was set before them, they've crossed the finishing line, they've received the crown of glory, and they're seeing Jesus now this very evening, no longer with the eye of faith, but seeing him even as he is and all his risen glory. And they know, as Paul reminds us in Romans chapter 8, their former sufferings were not worthy to be compared with the glory that has now been revealed in them.

And what they now have in glory, they want us to have also. What they have achieved through perseverance, they desire us to have also, that we would persevere.

And so they're urging us on, metaphorically speaking, as it were, keep going, throw off everything that hinders, everything that entangles your progress.

[23 : 04] Ignore every attraction that draws you to one side. This is the way as God puts it in Isaiah, walk ye in it. And remember that for us that great cloud of witnesses is not just those names recorded within the scriptures, but every saint who has subsequently died in the Lord and who strive for the faith here in Scotland and in the United Kingdom.

Those who refuse to bend the knee to tyranny. Those who chose to meet on the open hillsides to worship the Lord rather than engage in false rituals.

Those who died on the gallows in Edinburgh, who were bound at the stake, who were tied by their hair in the Salway Firth and died as the tide came in and took them away.

They preferred to die rather than deny their Lord. And although their names are not recorded here, they too are part of that great cloud of witnesses who are urging us on.

And we can give nothing to compare with the crown that they already have, that already adorns their heads. but we can run the risk that is set out before us.

[24 : 19] The risk set out before you, individuals, might be very different to the risk that is set out before myself and anyone else.

But we all have a collective responsibility. The baton of faith which we have received is to pass it on to those who are coming behind it and to pass it on intact.

In 2 Timothy, guard the good deposit that was entrusted to you, guard it with the help of the Holy Spirit who lives in us. The writer of this letter, Paul himself, they were observers of the culture in which they lived and it was an age of Greek culture and the Greeks loved athletics, they loved the games, they loved the Olympics, running, wrestling, throwing the discus and the javelin and in an age of long robes, no athlete would even contemplate running in their normal day-to-day clothing. They would take off their outer robes, but if you look at many of the statues in Greece, then it would seem that many of them chose to run absolutely naked, whether that's true or not, I'm not sure. They threw off everything that might hinder, they threw off everything that might entangle and cause them to fall and whoever was the writer of this particular letter was a keen observer of Greek culture and Greek life.

[25 : 54] And so for us living today, whatever would keep us from running the race, whatever would come between us and following the Lord Jesus Christ, whatever would hold us back in our spiritual life, and we need to throw it off.

The world will try to keep us back, it will try to hinder us, it will try to throw us aside to the right or to the left, it will strive to divert our gaze from Christ and prevent us from finishing the race.

That's what Satan wants, he doesn't want us to cross that finishing line, he wants to hinder us. And Paul himself knew all about the entanglements of this world and of their power to hinder, but he also saw them in the light of God's eternal glory.

And we read in the letter to the Philippians, but whatever was to my profit, I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. Excuse me. What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things, I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith.

Many years ago, I lost a relative, she had married a businessman who was very well off, and in a day when not many people went on expensive foreign holidays, they went to really nice places, they had a lovely house, their daughter had a pony, they had everything that the world could possibly give and that people desire, but I remember at her funeral, she had come to faith some months before, and the minister was relating to us what she had said, that compared to having Jesus, all these other things, although they were so desirable from a worldly point of view, they were at the end of the day, but dross compared to knowing the Lord Jesus Christ, and of course Jesus throughout his ministry, he was dogged by sinful legalistic men who opposed him, who opposed him at every turn, who contradicted him and eventually plotted to kill him, and yet never once did he waver, never once did he turn aside, never once did he cease to persevere, in the task for which he had come into this world, he let nothing hinder him, he let nothing entangle him, he looked ahead and he strove towards Calvary, because as he looked around him in the land of Israel, and he saw all the things that sin had brought into this world, his great desire was to bring freedom and cleansing and joy to the people of the Lord, he looked ahead, for the joy set before him, he endured the cross we read, and scorned its shame, may we also persevere, may we run the race that is marked out for us, and may we consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that we will not grow weary and lose heart, amen, and may the

[29 : 26] Lord, add his blessing to these thoughts and meditations on his word, we thank you, Lord, for the writer of Hebrews, whoever he was, you know, and we thank you, Lord, for the encouragement that he gives us to be looking to Jesus and not to be diverted by the things of this world which can hold such attractions to us, but Lord, we bring nothing into the world and we will take nothing from it, but if we have Jesus then the best is yet to come, forgive us for anything said that's not in conformity with your word, but the glory be yours, and the blessings ours in Christ Jesus our Lord, amen.

We conclude then by singing in a, sing Psalms, Psalm 62 verses 1 to 9, my soul signs rest in God alone, from him comes my salvation sure, my safety fortress sheltering rock, in him alone I am secure, how long will you assault a man, do you all seek to lay him low, this leaning wall, this tottering fence, and bring about his overthrow, Psalm 62 on page 79, singing verses 1 to 9. my soul finds rest in water Lord, from him comes my salvation sure, my safety for the sheltering home, in him alone I am secure, how long will you as Lord our blood do you all seek to the hill home, this leaning wall, this tottering fence, and bring apart his overthrow, they love his fold from his high place, they take delight his great in eyes, with host and fowl the hours they bless, but in their hearts thirst and despise, find rest my soul in

God alone, in him my hope is ever sure, my safety fortress shall stay rock, in him alone, I am secure, my and salvation and honor and salvation rest, rest, on God my war, almighty heart, O people trust in him always, always, to him alone, for a pure heart, the low-born man is but a prayer, the high-born man is heart, the man is but a light, we dare a balance side by side come to nothing but a side.

and now may mercy and peace from father, son and holy spirit, one God rest and amain with you all, now and forever.

[35 : 07] Amen. that that that that that that that that