

"Having illustrated the power of faith from past Patriarchal and Hebrew economies, the writer of this letter did not urge these Hebrew Christians to take any of those he had mentioned as an example. Their witness is to serve as inspiration, but not as perfect pattern."

-- G. Campbell Morgan

Hebrews 12:1-3 is divided into two parts, which we will consider in reverse order:

1. The Influence of the Faith of the Cloud of Witnesses on Our Living by Faith (v. 1)
2. The Supreme Witness of Jesus as an Example for Our Living by Faith (vv. 2-3)

The main point of the entire letter to the Hebrews is this: don't fall away from Jesus. This has been the especial focus of the author in chapters 10 and 11:

- 10:19-25 – Hold Fast
- 10:26-31 – Do Not Draw Back

This theme of **perseverance** can be found throughout the letter: 2:1-3; 3:12; 4:11; 6:11. *"...a life of faith is an intensely practical thing, consisting of very much more than daydreaming, or being regaled with joyous emotions, or even resting in orthodox views of the truth. A spiritual faith is not a passive thing, but an active, energetic, vigorous, and fruitful one."* [A. W. Pink]

A Note About the Cloud of Witnesses

The word *"therefore"* quite obviously tells us who the *witnesses* are: those the author has named or otherwise identified in chapter 11 from among the people of God in the Old Testament. The image here is not one of an arena where the present generation of believers is running a race while previous generations of believers are observing and cheering us on from the grandstands. The word *witnesses* expresses the idea that those the author has named in chapter 11 *give testimony to us* of what living by faith looks like (10:38) in practice. It is us – the present generation of believers – who are observing the previous generation, not the previous generation observing us. But even as we observe the testimony of these witnesses, the cloud of witnesses isn't our pattern for living by faith. Jesus is, just as He was their example for living by faith.

The Supreme Witness of Jesus as an Example for Our Living by Faith (vv. 2-3)

"Looking unto Jesus..."

"Looking" in verse 2 is a contrast with *"seeing"* in verse 1

aphorao – to turn your eyes from other things and fix your eyes on something

The sense of the Greek word translated *looking* is as much about **'looking away from the witnesses'** as it is **'looking unto Jesus.'**

Weymouth's translation: *"Looking off unto Jesus..."*

This isn't the first time in the letter the author has urged his readers to look to Jesus: 1:1-4; 2:6-10; 3:1-3; 5:1-10; 6:19-20; 7:20-28; 10:9-14

“...Jesus...”

It is important to note the author’s intentional use of the name “Jesus” as opposed to “Christ.” The emphasis is on *Jesus in his humanity living by faith in His Father* as he endured affliction, persecution, suffering, and death in the same human flesh as ours: 4:15-5:2; 5:7-8; 10:10, 20; 13:12

The stress is on His humanity because he was made like us, as our brother (2:11, 17).

“...the author and finisher of our faith”

“author” is *archēgos* which means “chief leader or prince” (see Acts 3:15; 5:31 and Hebrews 2:10). “Not so much one who *causes* or *originates*, as one who ‘takes the lead.’” [Pink]

Having introduced the reader to *a great cloud of witnesses*, the writer to the Hebrews now introduces them to **the Leader** of these witnesses – the chief of them all: Jesus.

G. Campbell Morgan translates “author” as *File Leader*, the soldier at the front of a marching file, setting the pace and acting as a model for others. Morgan sees Jesus as the head of this great procession of witnesses named in chapter 11: “*One personality who moves past the whole of them and stands at the head.*”

Jesus is our **Forerunner** (Hebrews 6:20), *the one who runs ahead as a scout to the place where the rest will follow* (compare Hebrews 9:24; 12:22-24).

“Our text is *not* referring the Christ begetting faith in his people and sustaining it to the end, though that is a truth plainly taught elsewhere. Instead, He is here viewed as the One, who Himself began and completed the whole course of faith, so as to be Himself the one perfect example and witness of what faith is.” [A. W. Pink]

“finisher” is *teleiōtēs* and is used nowhere else in the New Testament. It means *to perfect* or *bring to completion*. The sense of the original is that Jesus is the one who creates faith and brings faith to perfection not only in Himself, but in all of those to whom faith has been given (see Philippians 1:6). The reason our faith succeeds in our perseverance and final salvation is because *the captain of our salvation* (Hebrews 2:10) causes it to succeed.

“[Jesus] is the most complete model of faith and obedience that can be brought before us. Instead of including Him with the heroes of faith in chapter 11, He is here distinguished from them, as being above them. He is the Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the Ending...Jesus is beyond all comparison.” [A. W. Pink]

Jesus is not a mere *exemplar* of faith. He IS faith’s author and perfecter.

What Does Living by Faith Look Like in the Life of Jesus?

The life which Jesus lived here on earth was a life of faith. He looked always to His Father in **dependence** upon His Father, in **communion** with His Father, and **obedience** to His Father, looking away from “all discouragements, difficulties, and oppositions, committing His cause to the Lord who had sent Him, to the Father, whose will He had come to fulfill.” [Adolph Saphir]

“...for the joy that was set before him...”

A future focus on the fulfillment of His Father’s promises was the motivating joy of Jesus’s life. He had come to do His Father’s will (Hebrews 10:7; John 5:30; 8:29; 12:49-50). The joy of Jesus was doing the Father’s will by obeying His commandments in a life completely surrendered to the sovereign purposes of God.

In doing His Father’s will he was met with evil opposition, and yet he lived by faith that His suffering would culminate in glorious vindication. The **joy** is his obedience in doing the will of His Father (10:5-9; Psalm 40:8) with the promise of final reward in vindication at the Father’s right hand.

The Apostle Paul: “...**henceforth** there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness...” 2 Tim 4:8

“It is as the model Racer our Savior is here viewed. At the winning post hung a crown, in full view of the racers, and this was ever before the eye of the Captain of our salvation, as He pursued the course appointed Him by the Father. He steadily kept before Him the cheering and blissful reward: His heart laid hold of the Messianic prophecies recorded in Holy Writ: He had in steady prospect that satisfaction with which the travail of His soul would be fully compensated.” [A. W. Pink]

*“...endured the cross, **despising** the shame...”*

He endured not only the physical torture of the cross, but the shame of being sentenced to be executed by the state as a guilty criminal, and public humiliation of crucifixion (see Philippians 2:8 “**even** the death of the cross”). The cross was despised in the ancient world and a shameful way to die.

“Jesus despising the shame means ‘a rejection of regard for one’s reputation’...” [Tom Schreiner] See Philippians 2:7 and 1 Peter 2:21-25.

“In light of the joy set before Him, He regarded hardship, ignominy, persecutions, sufferings from men, as trifles...Mediate more upon the reward, the crown, the eternal joy – that outweighs all the little sacrifices we are now called upon to make.” [A. W. Pink]

*“...and is set down **at the right hand of the throne of God.**”*

The exaltation of Jesus to the Father’s throne is one of the central themes of Hebrews (1:3, 13; 8:1; 10:12) as the fulfillment of Psalm 110:1. Jesus endured the cross because of the reward of the throne.

The Captain of our salvation has triumphed, entering into the anticipated joy, and vested with supreme sovereignty in the dominion He exercises over all things. Hebrews 2:8-9; Ephesians 1:19-23; Revelation 3:21

*“...endured **such contradiction** of sinners against himself...”*

“contradiction” is hostility, the very same kind of hostility these Hebrew Christians were facing from their unbelieving families, the leaders of the synagogues, and the government of Rome.

“Consider Jesus in His steadfastness under relentless persecution,” is what the author of Hebrews is saying. “[Jesus} was opposed constantly, by word and action. He was opposed by His own people according to the flesh...As soon as His public ministry commenced, during the whole of its three years’ course, He endured one unbroken, relentless “contradiction of sinners against Himself.” [Pink]

Are we exasperated by the treatment we have received from sinners because of our faith in Jesus? The writer to the Hebrews would say to us, “Compare your suffering to that of the Captain of your salvation and you will conclude that the abuse we are enduring at the hands of sinners is light affliction indeed when compared with what our Savior endured.”

NEXT WEEK:

How Does the Faith of the Cloud of Witnesses Influence Our Living by Faith?

*“...let us **lay aside**...” 12:1*

*“...let us run with **patience**...” 12:1*

*“...lest you be **wearied and faint**...consider him” 12:3*