

Lesson Twenty-two

(12:1-2)

JESUS, THE EXAMPLE

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 perseverance the race that is set before us, ²looking to Jesus the pioneer 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.

Though we don't have much text to consider, this lesson is certainly most important. The whole epistle has centered upon Jesus, who he is in respect to God, who he is in respect to man. He has been presented as God's unique son and final spokesman, as the high priest of Christianity who sacrificed himself for the sins of all mankind and ever lies in God's presence to save those who draw near to God through him. He has been placed in contrast to angels, to Moses and Joshua, to Aaron and the Mosaic law system. In each instance, Jesus has been shown to be "better." Therefore, all that is real and true is of Christ, all else being shadow, Colossians 2:8-19, especially v. 17.

Our immediate text comes at the end of a long section relating to the life of faith which one must lead in order to be pleasing to God. Many great people have been cited to provide a solid basis for trusting God. Jesus is now presented as the primary example of what it means to trust God and do his will. He is the one to whom all are to look for the kind of life that pleases God, for he submitted to God's will even unto death. In so doing, he set us the example to follow, being both pioneer (the one who leads the way) and perfecter (the one who completes what is lacking) for every believer. Hence, the author quite rightly places Jesus before the readers of yesteryear and us today. Certain it is that with all the others who have been mentioned and with Jesus included, a grand crowd of believers is present to cheer us on, both by their own examples and by the encouragement therefrom. It is with all as it is with Abel: he though dead yet speaks.

12:1 — **Therefore** — This is the grand conclusion of the foregoing discussion concerning how a believer ought to live.

we — The author includes himself in these matters of Christian living. Paul had done somewhat the same thing in the I Corinthians 9:24-27 text.

cloud of witnesses — Most likely the ones just mentioned in the previous verses, though others could have been mentioned who were faithful. The particular metaphor being used has been variously explained over the years. The most likely thought that comes to mind is of a stadium filled with people who are watching a race in progress, cheering for their favorite. The basic point is this: Christians need not think that they are running the race alone, no one caring what happens, etc. The converse is true — God and those who have been faithful in the past ages are watching and cheering, and Jesus is both leading and a very present help in time of trouble.

laid aside — The things that would hinder the runner must be laid aside just like one lays aside old clothes. Colossians 3:8 has the same Greek term and the same sort of context; Romans 13:12 uses the same basic term and in the same vein of thought.

every weight — Probably means the sin that is next mentioned.

the sin — Whether this is some particular sin or just sin in general is disputed. It seems that in view of looking unto Jesus, and running the race as he ran it, whatever would hinder the runner must be thrown aside. Therefore, it seems better to take the word as referring to any sin, any time.

One does not become separated from God by any one sin, but rather by a life of sinning, continued disobedience, constant neglect of the Christian's high priest and that which he offers. This is the general context of 10:19ff. For this reason, then, the above interpretation is given.

with perseverance — The Greek term is *ὑπομονής*, used in 10:36. Some

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other texts are Luke 8:15; 21:19; Romans 2:7; 5:3, 4; 8:25; 15:4, 5; II Corinthians 1:6; 6:4; 12:12; Colossians 1:11; I Thessalonians 1:3; II Thessalonians 1:4; 3:5; I Timothy 6:11; II Timothy 3:10; Titus 2:2; James 1:3, 4; 5:11 and II Peter 1:6. Note that Jesus is described by this term in v. 3.

the race — The Greek term used to describe that which lies before the runner is *ἀγώνα*, which is often transliterated into English as "agony." See the term in Luke 13:24; 22:44; John 18:36; I Corinthians 9:25; Philipians 1:30; Colossians 1:29; 2:1; 4:12; I Thessalonians 2:2; I Timothy 4:10; 6:12; II Timothy 4:7. One is to go "all out" to win in the contest knowing that the cost for losing is far greater than the cost of winning.

V. 2 — **looking** — As 3:1 puts it, consider Jesus. The Christian "runner" is to see Jesus only, not looking to anyone or anything else. Peter was walking on water until he took his eyes off of Jesus and began to notice things about him, Matthew 14:28ff. Moses looked to the reward, 11:26; Abraham looked for a city, 11:10, etc. Christians are to do likewise.

pioneer — See on 2:10.

perfector — The term was used in 5:9; 7:19; etc. Without Jesus, no one is as God desires. When one puts on Christ, Romans 13:14; Galatians 3:27; and becomes "hid with Christ in God," Colossians 3:3, then God "sees" the Christian as if he were seeing Jesus. In such a state, one is considered "perfect" as Jesus is perfect.

joy set before — The joy was laid out before Jesus in the same way as the race is laid out before the runner, v. 1.

endured — The same basic Greek word as in v. 1. Jesus persevered as the Christian must. The "joy" laying at the end of the race was sufficient to keep Jesus running the race God had set before him. The Christian has a like motivation and Jesus as the example. It was not that Jesus did not feel the shame of all that was involved in his death, it was that such did not deter him from serving God in a pleasing way.

seated — Picking up the idea in 1:3, and common in the New Testament. The thrust is this: Jesus came to earth prepared to obey God, even unto death. Having done so, God highly exalted him. If the Christian will run the race until death, God will be faithful to him also, 6:9ff.

QUESTIONS FOR LESSON 22:

208. How about summarizing as much as you can what has been taught in Hebrews about Jesus?
209. How does our text fit into the epistle?
210. List some of the witnesses.
211. Why would the author say "us" rather than "you"?

212. What things are we to do to run as we ought?
213. Who of the cloud of witnesses is to be our example?
214. Discuss the possibilities for the word "sin."
215. Could one concentrate on one sin and conveniently "forget" some others?
216. When will sin not be a factor to consider?
217. How is Jesus both pioneer and perfecter?
218. Did Jesus have a race to run?
219. Which Christian has a more difficult race to run than Jesus had?
220. How is Jesus the example of perseverance?