

Looking Unto Jesus

Hebrews chapter 11 describes the suffering and affliction that holy men of old endured for the Truth's sake:

"others had trial of cruel mocking and scourging, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment: they were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain of the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented ...they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth ..." (Heb. 11:36-38).

Truly it is written that "we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God" (Acts 14:22). Chapter 12 however, brings our attention to focus upon the Lord Jesus Christ from that same aspect, of one who endured, yet overcame:

"... looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God" (Heb. 12:2).

As always, the context is of great importance. Verse 1 indicates that we do not idly stand by and watch Jesus: there is something required of us as well:

"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 ..."

Here, the life of the believer is likened to running a race. Jesus is at the finishing line, as it were. He has gone before and has obtained the victory. We are also running the race, and as we look to Jesus, we are encouraged that, unlike a normal race, he is willing to share the victory with us, that we might wear the coronal wreath as well as he.

The Apostle Paul, being 'moved' by Spirit guidance wrote in a similar vein:

"know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run that ye may obtain" (1 Cor. 9:24).

Notice again, how that the 'rules' of our race differs from normal, in that whilst ordinarily there is only one winner, those who strive to reach the finishing line can also obtain a victory. That is, they share in the victory of the One who has obtained the prize, even Messiah, the Holy One of God. The Apostle also spoke of his own experiences:

"forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press towards the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 3:13-14).

We can so easily forget the words that begin this quotation: "forgetting those things which are behind". Those things that are now past are beyond change. We can change our future by what we do next, but we cannot change those things that are past. So the exhortation is to look forward, and not behind: to focus on the victory, and not on past failures. This is the real exhortation of Hebrews 12:

“...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” (Heb. 12:1).

We must forget those things that are behind, or in other words, we must lay them aside, and bring all our attention to bear on winning the race with Messiah, who has gone in front as a forerunner. Looking unto Jesus, we are encouraged by his example, and setting our view upon him at the finishing line, we see a vision of the coming kingdom: a picture of joy that will enable us to obtain the victory as well as he.

The exhortation, therefore, is to “lay aside every weight and the sin which doth so easily beset us”. This theme of laying aside those things that can only hinder our victory occurs several times in Scripture, such as Colossians chapter 3:

“but now ye also **put off** all these; anger, wrath, malice, communication out of your mouth. Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have **put off** the old man with his deeds” (Col. 3:8-9),

Here, the focus is on that which comes out of our mouth. Putting off the works of the flesh, we must reflect a spirit of true holiness in our speech. Crucifying the flesh, we seek to live after the Spirit.

Again,

“... **laying aside** all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speaking, as newborn babes desire the sincere milk of the word that ye may grow thereby” (1 Pet. 2:1-2).

The works of the flesh can only hinder us, like additional baggage being carried about by the runner. We must lay aside anything that can threaten our obtaining the victory. To be winners with Christ is all that we desire: we have him in our sights, to show us that it is possible to reach the end. The baggage that we must leave behind will differ according to each individual circumstance. But in short anything that might make our race more difficult must be cast away. Notice here, there are two things to cast aside: “weight” and “sin”. It is not simply the case that particulars sins can hinder us, there are “weights” that might at times seem oppressive. Whether they be personal struggles that we have to deal with, the difficult circumstances of life: whatever the problem is, we can trust in Yahweh that we are not alone in our struggle. “Cast thy burden upon Yahweh, and he shall sustain thee: he shall never suffer the righteous to be moved” spake the sweet Psalmist of Israel (Psa 55:22). What comfort lies in these words! Again, Messiah spoke likewise:

“come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest ...” (Mat. 11:28)

But as well as attending to our own affairs, we must also look to the affliction of others, helping them to bear their own burdens: “bear ye one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the Law of Christ” (Gal. 6:2). As it is written again, “look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others. Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 2:4). The Mind of Christ is one of self sacrifice for the benefit of others, a mental disposition which we should all seek to develop.

The exhortation of Hebrews 12:2 is to fix our attention upon Jesus: “looking unto Jesus”. Here, we have an echo of Isaiah’s prophecy:

“look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth, for I am El, and there is none else” (Isa 45:22).

Like the serpent lifted up in the wilderness, we look with faith to Messiah lifted up in crucifixion first, but then received up in glory. He is our Saviour: we look to him for strength and hope. Hence Paul wrote to Titus:

“ ... denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ ...” (Tit. 2:12-13).

Notice the similar language used here: “denying” particular things, we “look for” other things. We look towards Jesus, not only as one who endured, but also one who has overcome. We look to Jesus in his glorious, immortal state, and long for his coming. He is where our hope lies: not in our own endeavours but according to the victory that He has won: “So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation” (Heb. 9:28).

The Master is described as being the “author and finisher of our faith”. The Greek translated “author” here, does not signify one who writes a book, but rather a ‘princely leader’, or Captain. It is the same word used in chapter 2 of Hebrews, referring to Christ as “the captain of salvation” (Heb. 2:10). Again, Peter spoke to the Jews:

“The God of our Fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew and hanged on a tree. Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins” (Acts 5:30-31).

Jesus is Messiah “the Great Prince”, (Dan. 12:1), one who has royal authority to bestow the coronal wreath upon those whom he chooses. He is a princely saviour, able to forgive men’s sins, and heal them from mortal infirmities and weaknesses at the appointed time. We must not lose hope therefore, for he is “the princely leader” of our faith.

The word rendered “finisher” signifies a “perfector”. The comparison seems to be that of a craftsman making a piece of furniture: the last thing he does after fitting all the components together, is to provide a “finish” to the piece: the final stage before the item is suitable for its purpose. So we read in the Psalms:

“Yahweh will **perfect** that which concerneth me: thy mercy, O Yahweh, endureth for ever” (Psa. 138:8).

And again, in Philippians:

“he which hath begun a good work in you **will finish it** (Marginal rendering) until the day of Jesus Christ” (Phil. 1:6).

THE JOY

Concerning Messiah, it is written that it was “for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God” (Heb. 12:2). His endurance was made possible by that vision of Joy that he had ever before his mind. But what was that “joy” that he would have at his Father’s Right Hand? The Psalmist speaks of this:

“ ... thou wilt not leave my soul in hell; neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption. Thou wilt show me the path of life: in thy presence is fullness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore” (Psa. 16:10-11)

Notice in this place, that the Joy is “in thy presence”. What a joyous moment that must have been when Messiah ascended to His Father’s dwelling place, and for the first time, was physically brought into His Hallowed presence! What great joy for both the Father and Son to see each other face to face for that first time! That was the joy that was ever set before the mind of Messiah. Acts chapter 2 cites Psalm 16 (above):

“... thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption. Thou hast made known to me the ways of life: thou shalt make me full of joy with thy countenance” (Acts. 2:28).

Again, we see that the “joy” is “with thy countenance” or as another rendering has it: “in your presence”. This is what we so earnestly long for: to behold the glory of God in joyful immortality.

There is a great importance in maintaining a constant picture of the Kingdom in our minds. It imparted to Christ a strength that enabled him to overcome, and whilst we still struggle with our nature, it is able to strengthen us to look beyond present difficulties to that day when the constraints of a mortal existence will be removed. So it is written in the Proverbs:

“Where there is no vision, the people perish: but he that keepeth the Law, happy is he” (Prov. 29:18).

Notice the marginal alternative rendering for the word “perish” – “is made naked”. Without a vision, the people are made naked. What does this mean? The same sentiments are echoed in the Apocalypse: “behold, I come as a thief. Blessed is he that **watcheth**, and keepeth his garments, **lest he walk naked**, and they see his shame” (Rev. 16:15). The sense here, is that to “watch”, or see, enables us to keep our garments, but lack of sight means we do not have the same strength to keep them unspotted from the world. We are clothed upon with the garments of righteousness, provided through the Lamb slain from the foundation of the World, and we must share his vision in looking towards the day of coming glory.

So it was that the Master endured the cross, and despised the shame, but looked ahead to the final outcome of things. We have his example to motivate us to do likewise. As we cited earlier, the exhortation is given: “let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus ...” (Phil. 2:5). Sharing Messiah’s disposition of thought, we delight in the spiritual beauties of the Wisdom revealed in the Word before us. We long for that day when we shall live and reign with him, and share his Victory. As it is written: “whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith” (1 Jno. 5:4)

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