Palm Sunday Hebrews 12:1-3
April 10, 2022 131-133-371/120-130

Keep Your Eyes Fixed on Jesus!
I. And be assured of your salvation.
II. And find strength to live for Jesus.

Dear Christian friends,

TODAY we hear the crowds **cheering** Jesus. Come FRIDAY they will be shouting for His crucifixion. **Sometimes** the impression is given that the SAME PEOPLE who were praising Jesus **today** were calling for His death on Friday. Is that POSSIBLE? Sure it is! But in all honesty – and practicing the 8th Commandment – we can't say that **for sure**.

We can be FAR MORE SURE about things if we look instead **at ourselves**. Granted, **during the week** we aren't crying for Jesus' death. But do we joyfully praise Jesus **in church** and then ignore Him **during the week**? Do we boldly confess Jesus **here at church** but then deny Him with our **everyday lives**? it can be so hard LIVING OUR CHRISTIAN FAITH in our **daily lives**!

These Hebrew Christians were being persecuted for their faith. **Some** were wavering. **Some** were ready to keep their faith but they were also ready to KEEP QUIET about their faith. This letter was written to **encourage** them in their Christian faith and **life**. It's an encouragement WE ALSO can use.

As we go through another Holy Week we too are encouraged – KEEP YOUR EYES FIXED ON Jesus! **Keep your eyes fixed** on Jesus 1)and be assured of your **salvation** and 2)find strength to live for Jesus.

I. And be assured of your salvation.

"Let us keep our eyes fixed on Jesus." Today we see Jesus a man about 33 years old riding a donkey into Jerusalem. The crowds gave Him **their version** of the **red-carpet** welcome. But riding that donkey Jesus looked like **any other** Jewish man. **Sadly** that's all many see in Jesus – a GREAT GUY – a wonderful teacher – a **good** role model – and they STOP there.

FIX your eyes on Jesus and see Him FOR WHO He **really** is – the **eternal, almighty** Son of God born a true man. To hail Jesus as a **great guy** but not our **almighty God** is NOT GOOD ENOUGH. That doesn't go FAR enough. Jesus of Nazareth is "TRUE GOD, begotten of the Father from eternity and also true man, born of the virgin Mary."

"Keep your eyes fixed" on that Jesus! **This week** take a GOOD LOOK at Jesus and take it ALL IN. Paul wrote in Philippians 2, ***"(Jesus) being in very nature God …made Himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant."*** So we've seen SO FAR this church year. We saw Jesus' humble birth in Bethlehem. We've watched Him grow up and live a **holy, sinless** life. We've heard God declare, ***"This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased."***

Now it's **Palm Sunday**. Riding that donkey into town Jesus knew exactly what this week would bring Him. On different occasions Jesus had told His disciples, ***"We are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and teachers of the law. They will condemn Him to death and will turn Him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified. ON THE THIRD DAY He will be raised to life!"***

This is indeed HOLY Week. This week takes us to the HEART of the **gospel** and our **Christian faith** and hope – Jesus crucified AND risen. As Paul explained to the Philippian Christians Jesus ***"humbled Himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross."*** Now we're encouraged, ***"Let us keep our eyes fixed on Jesus, who is the author of our faith and the one who brings it to its***

goal. In view of the joy set before Him, He endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken His seat at the right hand of God's throne."

Holy Week was not easy on Jesus – the betrayal and **denials** – the ridicule and **rejection** – the scourging and **crucifixion** – the HELL of being ***"forsaken/abandoned"*** by His Father. God's Word reveals why this happened. ***"(Jesus) was pierced for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities. God made Him who had no sin to be sin for us. He Himself bore our sin in His body on the tree."*** IN OUR PLACE and to our credit Jesus had lived a **life perfect** in every way. **On the cross** Jesus was punished for the sins of the whole world. KEEP YOUR EYES FIXED on Jesus and see Him personally pay for **every one** of your sins by giving His body into death and shedding His blood that first Good Friday. KEEP YOUR EYES FIXED on Jesus and be assured of **your salvation**!

Actually for a minute take your EYES OFF of Jesus and take a good look **at yourself** instead IN THAT MIRROR of God's law. Picture God standing next to you – see yourself and God **side by side** in that mirror. HOW do you look compared to God? God never said, "BE A GOOD person." God has said, ***"Be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy."*** Do you look – FEEL – holy **standing next** to the all-holy God? Looking at yourself in that mirror of the 10 Commandments DO YOU SEE things in your that you hope God **doesn't notice**? GOD SEES it **all** – hears it **all** – knows it **all**. Looking in that mirror – do you notice the devil coming **up behind** you ready to drag you to hell?

"Let us fix our eyes BACK on Jesus!" WHAT A SIGHT for sore eyes Jesus is! Our salvation is NOT BECAUSE **we're** such great and wonderful Christians. We aren't! Our forgiveness and **peace** with God are based SOLELY ON Jesus and what He all did in our place. That makes our salvation an ACCOMPLISHED FACT! **Trusting** in Jesus CRUCIFIED AND RISEN we are forgiven – we are going **straight** to heaven when we die.

"Let us keep our eyes FIXED on Jesus." That's the purpose of all the **different services** this week – the purpose of church every week. The devil wants to DISTRACT us – make us forget about Jesus. He'll try to convince us there's NO WAY God can still love us – can still forgive us **after whatever** we've done. KEEPING OUR EYES ***"fixed on Jesus"*** is not a bother but a RELIEF. Coming to church and Holy Communion – having daily devotions at home – is not a WASTE of time but so refreshing. FIXING our eyes on Jesus as we begin a **new day** – a new week - ASSURES us of **our salvation** and also…

II. Give us strength to live for Jesus.

It's NOT EASY living for Jesus. It's a DAILY BATTLE. The devil is SO DETERMINED to **come between** Jesus and us. The world can be SO TEMPTING and **appealing**. Our sinful natures are SO STUBBORN and **defiant**. We get tired. We can feel like GIVING UP.

These verses compare **living for Jesus** to a race – **not** a SHORT, FAST SPRINT but the long haul of a marathon. ***"Let us run with patient endurance the race that is laid out for us."*** Running especially a **long-distance** face demands CONCENTRATION and EFFORT – DEDICATION and DETERMINATION. Living **for Jesus** calls for that and EVEN MORE. The goal of our race is **eternal life** in heaven. To lose this race is to spend eternity in hell.

"Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, …let us run with patient endurance." You might recall that **Hebrews 11** is the great "HEROES OF FAITH" chapter in the Bible. For 40 verses **OT heroes** of faith are mentioned – **Abel, Enoch, Noah**, Abraham and on down the line. Their races WEREN'T EASY either. **Some** of them had it much worse than we ever will. Yet they ran – they KEPT ON running – they clung to their Savior – they lived their faith – they CROSSED the **finish line**. THEIR EXAMPLE spurs us on in our race. We push on EVEN HARDER looking forward to **joining them** in heaven ***"before the throne of God and in front of the Lamb."***

"Therefore, …let us get rid of …the sin that so easily ensnares us." You don't run a race WEARING something like this - or in a dress and **high-heeled** shoes. That would just slow you down and make the race THAT MUCH HARDER to run – and win!

We don't want anything to SLOW us down in living **for Jesus**. Being a Christian means GAINING Jesus' **love** and **forgiveness**. It also means GIVING UP some things. We must daily ***"deny ourselves, take up our cross and follow Jesus"*** OR we'll soon be disqualified from the race.

What is ***"the sin that so easily ensnares us"***? ANY sin can finally trip us up in our **race of faith**. But the devil knows we each have our own **particular** WEAKNESSES. Maybe it's messed up priorities in life – we won't give God **first place** in our lives. Maybe it's our PERSONAL MORALS – or it's WORRYING about things instead of trusting God's promises. Maybe it's COMPLAINING about whatever instead of being grateful for **how good** God is to us. Maybe it's the friends we **hang around** with. It can be DRINKING too much – having plenty of time for **sports** but NO TIME for worship or God's Word. The LIST runs long!

WHATEVER it may be – ***"let us get rid of …the sin that so easily ensnares us."*** Maybe we need to get **new friends** – stop going to the bar – rearrange our **priorities** or **schedules** – clean up our language, etc. It WON'T BE EASY but consider the goal of our race – **eternal life** in heaven. The devil wants us to FORGET THE CONSEQUENCES of **defying** and **disobeying** God. God wants us to REMEMBER THE GOAL of our faith – eternal life in heaven. **Sometimes** we need to just bluntly ask ourselves, "Is this REALLY WORTH going to hell for?" If it's not – then TOSS it!

"Let us run with patient endurance the race that is laid out for us." God has CHARTED the course for us. There are countless passages that describe it. ***"It is God's will that you should be holy, that you should avoid sexual immorality. Be imitators of God, as dearly loved children, and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave Himself up for us. Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well."***

A tough race? Yes! **Therefore** the encouragement, ***"Let us keep our eyes fixed on Jesus. In view of the joy set before Him, He endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken His seat at the right hand of God's throne."*** To find strength for our race we're right back to where we were before – IN GOD'S WORD – in God's HOUSE – at Jesus' SUPPER – this Holy Week – and every week. Amen.

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