

Since We Are Surrounded

- ¹ 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,
- ² 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.
- ³ Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted."

Hebrews 12:1-3

The Witness of a Hero

THERE I WAS, TEEING OFF on the 10th hole of Bear Creek Country Club. It is a 400-yard hole, dog-leg left. Hit the ball far enough over the junk on the left and you can cut the distance by 40 yards. The biggest hitters can even hit the

green. I've never seen anyone do it, though I've come close a time or two. Having just come out of the lunch room, we had our sandwiches and snickers bars and I'm stoked. *Come on now. You can do it. Time for a better back nine.* I'm readying myself to go for it yet again, knowing full well that almost every time I do it, I end up with a lost ball and a two stroke penalty. Suddenly, I look on the tee box.

They let a foursome go off in front of me and my dad—a twosome. Not cool. Now all I can think about is how long before these bozos will let us play through. Just then I see this this athletic looking guy, almost shining, maybe Swedish or something. He stands tall, addresses his ball, and with the effortless ease of someone like a professional hockey player who swings sticks for a living, takes the club back oh so smoothly. *Great transition.* “Swoosh, swoosh, crack!” *Who is this guy?* The dude cuts the dog-leg 360+ yards, right next to the green. Maybe on it. But I don't care.

“Dad, do you know who that is?”

“Who?” he asks, munching on some chips.

“That's my hero. That's my cousin. That's Peter Forsberg.” My great grandfather was a Forsberg from Sweden, and we had wondered many times if we might not

be related to Herr Peter (no, that isn't German, it is Swedish too), who just happens to be the fourth all time in assists per game and eighth all time in points per game player in the history of the NHL, and largely responsible for bringing Colorado its first national champion in any significant team sport (and a second later on).

“I bet we can play through them,” I tell dad. “We can find out. And, we get to meet Peter Forsberg! Where is grandpa Forsberg from again?” I ask.

“Dalarna. I think it is Dalarna.”

“OK, I'll ask him.” So there we sit, in our cart following pretty much my all time hero around the course for several holes, when we come to the perilous little 13th. A short, 160-yard par three lofted high over the water behind which is tucked the narrowest but widest green you've ever seen, 120 ft. long and only 30 ft. deep. They whistle us to play through.

Now is my shining moment, my 15 seconds of fame, my chance to prove to someone special that I'm a somebody! I stand, nervously over the ball with my eight iron. Waggle. Waggle. Sweat is dripping off my hands. I have to wipe them. Waggle. Waggle.

“Just swing the dumb club already,” I’m scolded by my father who is rolling his eyes at me. “Swoosh, swoosh, chunk!” *Right into the drink with Peter Forsberg looking on. Swell. Real swell. Idiot.* I’m mumbling to myself. *Oh well.* I take out another ball and nonchalantly knock it on the green, 35 feet from the hole.

“I promise you, I’m not going to double bogey this hole, dad. I’m making the putt.” More eye rolling.

We get to the green and I introduce myself, say a couple of dumb things, fumbling over my words in front of my hero, but managing to ask him if he is from Dalarna. “I’m pretty sure we could be related,” I wink at *ol’* Pete—not my dad this time. “Actually, we’ve been wondering if it is possible,” I tell him, “because my great grandfather is a Forsberg. You are something of a regular item of conversation in our house, and not just because you’re the toughest, most athletic, total stud hockey player we’ve ever seen.” More eye rolling.

“No. I’m from farther north in Örnsköldsvik,” he tells me. “I doubt if we have relatives in Dalarna.”

“I’m pretty sure you do. You look just like some of my relatives,” I respond, putting my foot in my mouth once

again. *Idiot. Just make the dumb putt and redeem yourself even the tiniest bit. Puh-lease.*

These are the moments when boys become men. I stand over the ball for the twenty-somethingth time today. I haven't made a putt. I couldn't buy a putt. *35 feet. This baby is going in. Smooth stroke now.* Tap. The ball starts rolling. Faster and faster downhill on the lightning fast green, a five-foot break to the right.

You know how it ends, right? You know how my story ends? *Clink! Center cut, bottom of the hole.* I “Chi-Chi Rodriguez” my putter with his patented sword of Zoro action, fancy footwork and all right to the hole. I look right in the eyes of Peter Forsberg and say, “Meh, I saved bogey.” The point is, to quote R. Kent Hughes, “**The presence of notable witnesses is motivating, whatever one’s activity may happen to be.**”¹ All the more so when it happens to be your favorite athlete in the world.

Beloved, how much more even than that with this great cloud of witnesses that we are seated next to, who surround us and who testify to us on our pilgrimage to the Heavenly

¹ R. Kent Hughes, *Hebrews: An Anchor for the Soul*, vol. 2, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1993), 157.

City? Abel. Enoch. Noah. Abraham. Moses. Joshua. Daniel. Let us turn to Hebrews and see what I'm talking about.

Reorienting

The passage today is **Hebrews 12:1-3**. These three little verses have received more than their fair share of attention over the years, both as the topic of sermons and of study. Let's try to understand why they are here first. I want you to think about worship. Worship is something that most people, I fear, think of as being done only in a church. But that is only the beginning of worship. That is where God's people gather to worship. But what about after that?

Hebrews 12 is the main transition in the whole book. It really marks the end of the Apostle's exposition of the OT and the beginning of his application (of course, each section contains smaller amounts of the other as well). In many respects, this is like the book of Romans, except that Romans is not a biblical theology.

For 11 chapters of Romans, the Apostle delves into **systematic themes** like total depravity, the role of the law, divine sovereignty and predestination, perseverance,

evangelism, and the role of Israel in God's redemptive program. He ends this longest part of the book with a doxology of worship: "Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! 'For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?' Or 'who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?' For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen" (Rom 11:33-36). If theology is just a head trip and does not lead to worshiping a God who at the end of the day is incomprehensible and as far above our knowledge as the heavens are above the earth, then either you are not studying the God of the Bible or you do not know him.

Immediately after this, Romans begins its **application**. It likewise deals with worship. "I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your **spiritual worship**" (Rom 12:1). Worship, but not necessarily in church. Rather, it is all the time. And how? "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the

will of God, that is good and acceptable and perfect” (2).

Hebrews 1-11, of course, has had a different focus from Rom 1-11. This is the supremacy of Jesus Christ above all thing. Greater than angels. Greater than Moses. Greater than Aaron. Greater than the law. Greater than OT sacrifices. Greater than the older covenants. Jesus is superior to all things. Chapter 11 has then told us that the saints of old knew this and were looking forward to it by faith. But **Hebrews 12:1-3** is very similar in purpose to **Rom 12:1-2**, though its language is very different.

It likewise begins with “**therefore,**” thus as if to say, “**Because of all that you have now heard, in light of these things, with those thoughts squarely and clearly in your mind...**” Especially to the content of Hebrews 11. “**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**” (**Heb 12:1**).

This verse and the next make up two of the most well known verses in Hebrews, and perhaps even the whole NT. Why? It is both its **content** and **construction**. Some say the first verse shows signs of being **an ancient hymn fragment**.

It has the style, syntax, strophes, form, arrangement, and most of all the basic Christological content that we find in other likely biblical hymn fragments such as parts of **Php 2** or **Col 1** or **1 Tim 3:16**.² It could be called a song of King Jesus.

The first two verses together create a memorable chiasm:

- A Having *seated around about* us such a cloud of witnesses,
- B *Setting aside* every weight and every clinging sin
- C with *patience endurance*
- D Let us run the *race that is set before us*
- E **Keep our eyes on Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of the faith**
- D¹ Who for the *joy that was set before him*
- C¹ *patiently endured* a cross
- B¹ *despising shame*
- A¹ and *is seated* at the right hand of the throne of God³

² First found in **Estella B. Horning**, “Chiasmus, Creedal Structure, and Christology in Hebrews 12.1-2,” *Biblical Research* 32 (1978): 37-58; also **David Alan Black**, “Animadversiones: A Note on the Structure of Hebrews 12, 1-2” in *Biblica* 68:4 (1987): 543-551.

³ Ibid. Against this is **N. Clayton Croy**, *Endurance in Suffering Interpreting Hebrews 12.1-13* in Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series 98 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 191. His claim seems pretty weak to me, but it is worth mentioning that A and A¹ rely on the translation of “seated.” The word in the ESV is “surrounded.” You don’t find any English translations saying “seated.” This translation of the word *perikeimai* rests in the root word *kimai* which means to set; lie; place. Related words like *anakeimai*, *katakeimai*, and *sunanakeimai* mean to recline at table and *prokeimai* means to “lie or set before.” Someone else

Why would we care about such a thing? Two reasons. First, **style matters to God**. We've seen this time and again in Hebrews. As someone has said, **"To the biblical authors, artistry in the use of structure was not an end in itself; it was a means toward more effective communication of their messages."**⁴ It is just like in the worship. God cares about form. God cares about worship, and in the case of these two verses especially, they are meant to lead us to worship.

Second, this chiasm can **help us understand the central point**, the focus, of the verses. This focus is different from what a lot of people are told. "Look at their faith. Be like them." Those two little sentences are important, but left by themselves—which they often are—the results can be deadly. Professor Baugh says, **"Note that our author does not call the OT believers of Heb 11 *examples* for us to emulate—though that may be a secondary implication of our text. Rather, they are first and foremost *witnesses* who**

has rendered it, **"Literally, the phrase reads, 'Having so great a cloud of witnesses lying around us.'**" (Frederic R. Howe, "The Challenge for Spiritual Vision: An Exegesis of Hebrews 12:1-3," *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society* 13 [2000]: 26 [25-35]. Hence, "seated." It is certainly possible that there is a play on words going on here to create the chiasmic effect.

⁴ **R. E. Man**, "The Value of Chiasm for New Testament Interpretation," *BibSac* 141 (1984): 154. Cited in Black.

testify to the reality of the heavenly verities which God has promised to them and to us.”⁵ You see, though the faith of the heroes in the Hall of Faith is there begging you to emulate it, without the power to do so, it is nothing less than man-made legalistic works righteousness. Curious. We can even turn faith into a work.

The way **vs. 1** is often understood and, in part, translated, can add to this if we are not careful. There seems to be a metaphor here. It seems to be that of **a race**. Thus, it is common to see commentators assume that what is in mind is something like this. Using perhaps an **Olympic** analogy, Hebrews takes an track and field metaphor (that’s one of the more subtle purposes of my introduction) to motivate readers to rid themselves of sin, run the race, regard Jesus, and reflect upon the faith of the saints.⁶

They say, we are to imagine a huge stadium, like the Roman Coliseum. It is filled with people. These are the “cloud of witnesses.” Someone writes, “**They are “crowded as it were row upon row within the encircling**

⁵ S. M. Baugh, “The Cloud of Witnesses in Hebrews 11,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 68, no. 1 (2006): 120.

⁶ For the following summary see **Colin Sims**, “Rethinking Hebrews 12:1,” *Irish Biblical Studies* 27:2 (2008): 54-57 [54-88]. http://www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/irish-biblical-studies/27-2_054.pdf

amphitheater.”⁷ The analogy, so it goes, next relates to how the runners ran in those days. Unlike modern times, the Greeks were completely uninhibited. They would strip naked before competing. Thus, “lay aside every weight” is supposed to be the analogy. We are to strip ourselves bare of sin’s entanglements. This is a marathon now, so we have to run for a long time before we finally win the prize. Thus, “endurance” is more important than sprinting. You try and sprint in this race, you will tire very quickly and give up.

That all sounds great, and in places it even is a biblical metaphor. But something seems amiss with the totality of what people seem to think this is saying. Ask yourself why someone writing to a bunch of Jewish Christians, probably former priests, would use a metaphor that would almost certainly offend them (with the implied nudity)? Scholars have started asking just that question and are thus opting for a different metaphor where words like “run” and “race” are given different, but very possible meanings. “Run” (*trecho*) often means “to strive or press onward.” “Race” (*agon*) almost always means an intense struggle against strong

⁷ Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews*, The New International Commentary on the Old and New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1977), 519.

opposition. It can mean something like “**mortal peril**,” and clearly the previous chapter and vv. 2-3 have in mind not beating someone in a race, but overcoming peril, danger, and death.

Thus, the metaphor here is not so much a race as it is a **pilgrimage**. John Bunyan would be pleased. The setting is not a coliseum, but life itself. It is not a race, but a constant struggling to move forward to get to heaven itself. In other words, it is exactly what we would expect having just finished Hebrews 11.

As we try to get ourselves in the proper context, the word “**witnesses**” is also very important to understand. This word never refers to a group of onlookers, especially people who are just coming to watch a sporting event. This can give us the completely wrong impression of what the witnesses are actually doing here. They are not cheer leaders sitting on the sidelines offering up dance moves and catchy chants to keep us motivated. Like witnesses in a court, like Abel’s blood, these people are living witnesses—in heaven—of the faith it takes to finish, and of the person in whom faith must be placed in order to even begin the journey home. They are the great cloud, a picture used in the OT for glory, for

heaven, and a phrase used in the Greek poets for a huge throng.

The people who are here in this cloud **may not be athletically gifted** like Peter Forsberg who was such an inspiration to me that I set aside all my other thoughts in order to do well before his watching eye. No, they are so **much greater**, because their witness is not about sports but salvation. These are people who are both instantly recognizable, and sometimes completely obscure. These are the famous and the unknown. Moses is testifying. Abraham is speaking. But so also are the poor widows who aren't even named. They surround us, they go before us, they encourage us, and most of all they testify to us as witnesses that what we are trying to do is not in vain and can be done if the eyes are fixed on the right object.

Rid Ourselves of Hindrances

There are **four things that we are told to do** in these verses: **rid**, **run**, **regard**, and **reflect**. Thus, he moves from right thinking to right behavior. Now that your mind has been set firmly where it should, now that your thinking is

proper, now that you understand the relationship of the present age of Christ to the fading shadows of the the OT, now that you have been granted faith and know what it is, it is time to do something about it.

The first is that we are to “lay aside every weight and sin which clings so closely” (Heb 12:1). Someone has called it “divesting yourself.”⁸ I call it ridding yourself. Of what? Sin. But in order to understand the command, we have to understand the problem. What is sin?

This question could take up several sermons, but basically sin is when you deviate from God’s revealed will and desire for you, especially in his law. Sin makes no sense apart from God, and this is the reason why our secularized culture no longer takes it seriously. It is meaningless to them. You can’t sin if there is no one to sin against. But we know better. Frankly, so do they.

The meaning of sin is vast and hard to summarize, because there are actually over 50 words in Hebrew that describe it.⁹ The three most popular help us think about

⁸ R. Kent Hughes, *Hebrews: An Anchor for the Soul*, vol. 2, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1993), 158. The four points I’m making I have renamed, but I’m following Hughes excellent sermon outline and several points from it. I recommend reading it.

⁹ Robin C. Cover, “Sin, Sinners: Old Testament,” ed. David Noel Freedman, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 31.

what sin is. One word (*chata*) means something like being mistaken or found deficient or at fault, thereby **missing the mark**. The word is used in archery for someone who can't hit the target (**Jdg 20:16**), or like many men who refuse to ask for directions, of missing the right road (**Prov 19:2**). Like me, if you move (or if someone take something), you can miss your property (**Job 5:24**) or you can be missing in something like wisdom (**Prov 8:36**).

A second word (*pasha*) is a **willful, deliberate violation** of a norm or standard. This is the idea of rebellion, or a revolt, a breach of covenant and the alliance you have with a fellow king (**1Kg 12:19**). As the law is the terms of the covenant God made with man and then Israel and even now us, this word fits best for breaking God's law.

A third word (*awon*) means something like “**error and iniquity**.” It is deeply religious in meaning, profoundly immoral, and always refers to iniquity before God. This is the idea of sin and guilt and resulting punishment. Put together, you start to get a picture for how serious sin is and what exactly it is.

Sometimes **sin is personified**. In **Genesis 4** is is likened to a **demon** who lies in wait, crouching to pounce on an

unsuspecting person. In **Romans 6-7**, it is likened to a **slave master** who owns you until freed by Christ and a **spouse** you are wed to until death which frees us from our vows to it (Paul did not mean to imply that a spouse is like sin). We are not to let sin reign over us anymore people like our Founding Fathers would let a tyrannical **King** rule over them. In **James 1**, sin is like a **pregnant woman**. It can give birth, and when it gives birth, it gives birth to Death.

In Hebrews, sin is likened to a terrible dangerous trap. Something like the NAS has sin “**entangling**” us. You can think of walking through a **dense jungle** and getting all tangled up in the suffocating undergrowth and vines. Or perhaps a carnivorous plant like the **beautiful sundew plants**, with their sweet nectar that lures in the fly, but once he lands, three sticky little hairs bend over his wings, preventing him from leavening. He doesn't care at the moment, because he is too busy eating. But soon, when he tries to fly away, he finds that he can't. And so he struggles, harder and harder, only to find that more and more of these hairs are bending over, coating him with the sticky material, trapping him. Two hours later, he's been sucked dry of all his life-force. He is just a skeleton now, easily discarded for the next

unsuspecting little creature. Proverbs uses the metaphor of a prostitute on the streets who entices you with flattering words, promising you a night of pleasure for little more than a handful of change. But she is Death itself and those who go to her find themselves down in the grave. Bob Dylan sang about just this and he was *Tangled Up In Blue*.

The ESV has it as something that clings closely and is a heavy weight. Kind of like Christian's "burden" that he has to carry on his journey to the Celestial City. Severian of Gabala wrote, "Let us lay aside every weight. 'Weight' is a sin of the enjoyment of the flesh, a form in which the 'sin which clings so closely' is born. It clings closely to us as it surrounds us with pleasure and subdues us to its own will" (*Fragments on Hebrews* 12.1).

So many ways of picturing sin. But do you get the point? Sin is something you must be utterly suspicious of, on your guard against, constantly vigilant and fighting. What you are ultimately fighting against is something that is inside of you and something that in your flesh you desperately love doing. Why do we sin? Because we like it. It clings closely because it is inside of us and because we are attracted to it, just like the fly, just like the man who hears the call of a siren

and goes out to her at night. In this way, it surrounds us, it entangles us, it pulls us down.

Sin is the chief danger of the Christian, really of all people, for sin is what brings us to hell. **Sin never does anyone any good.** Sure, it gives temporary pleasures. But this is just its power and allure. It may give us temporary riches, chemical highs, fleshly euphoria. It gain you status or power or fame. But they always fade. Time is the great leveler of us all. And in their wake comes ruin, misery, destruction, broken relationships, ended friendships, ruined lives, fines, prison, war, death, hell. No matter how good you are at it, you can not escape its doom. Even the Clintons won't be able to escape its clutches at the end of the day.

So sin surrounds us all. But we are surrounded by **a cloud of witnesses.** These witnesses were sinners just like you and I. But they journeyed on and made it to the end because of faith. God preserved them and brought them home. These witnesses are here, even this very moment, speaking to you not from the other side, but from *this* side by their lives and trials and deaths, telling you to lay the weight of sin down. R. E. Bartlett wrote, **“He summons them ... one by one, as witnesses of the unseen power which animated them, to**

testify to us that as they ran so we can run ; as they overcame so can we overcome ... They are not here and there, but they compass us about on every side ... They are not one or two, but a cloud.”¹⁰ Herodotus said, “Wherefore I say to you,--as it is to a fortunate chance that we owe ourselves and Hellas, and have driven away so mighty a cloud of enemies, let us not pursue after men that flee.” (Herodotus 8.109). This is how many friendly witnesses we have!

As we saw, sin is a **heavy burden**. It is something that when you engage in it, and engage in more, becomes all consuming. You think about it. You obsess upon it. It destroys your mind. It ruins your thoughts. It forces your body to do things against its will. Like a weightlifter who is in over his head, the weight comes crashing down, and his body is helpless against the freefall.

Perhaps the scariest thing about this is that these sins are the sins that **each one of us is prone to individually**. I may be tempted by something that in a million years you wouldn't even consider, but also visa-versa. This is what the KJV calls “**besetting sin**.” These are the sins that entangle you personally. Our culture is in the throes of sexual sin, but not

¹⁰ Bartlett, R. E. “The Cloud of Witnesses: Heb. xii.1.” *Exp* 1st ser. 5 (1877). 152 [149–53].

everyone. Churches have been utterly destroyed by gossip, but not everyone gossips. Some are tempted by pride. Others by doctrinal righteousness which replaces the righteousness of Christ. Some want to look good in front of others. Some are consumed with rage and hate. Some are utterly discontent in their life and they complain in virtually every sentence they speak. Some can't consume certain even good things because for them they become addictive and destructive. What are the sins that beset you? I can't blast on one sin, when all sin is the problem. I can't single one of you out when we all need to be singled out and woken up. When they do come at you and seek to entangle you, are you prepared to put them down?

Run the Race

But how do you do this? That is the vital question. Perhaps you never have. Perhaps you love your sin and think I'm crazy. But maybe you are greatly burdened by your own besetting sins. Do you see those in the cloud speaking to you now? What are they saying? They are saying that you can't just will faith into existence. This is not

mind over matter. This is not a twelve steps program. Look at what is in apposition to ridding yourself of sins hindrances: “and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us.” “Running” or better “striving or struggling to press on,” in this place that Jerome called “a valley of tears,” is the second thing you are commanded to do. He said, “This place, then, a valley of tears, is not a condition of peace, not a state of security, but an arena of struggle and of endurance” (Jerome, *Homilies on Psalm 16*).

Let us get back on the trail and keep on walking ahead towards the goal. If you have ever gone backpacking, you know how heavy those packs can be. If you are like me, you don't go packing just to pack. And the Christian life is certainly not *just* a journey! Wandering around aimlessly on a journey is for sinners who aren't allowed to enter the Promised Land, not for you and me.

You set off because you are going somewhere, like to top of Mt. Everest. I'm not one for long trails. I like going up! But it's dangerous. You have to take things with you. You have baggage. Some is necessary. But it is the unnecessary things, the tempting things that we take—the sin—that is so dangerous. I remember one time hiking with

a young man who had never gone up a mountain before. So he packed and packed and packed. A full gallon of water. A 20 -pound video camera. I think he even brought a solar powered refrigerator with him. For a three-hour hike. It was like he was going to Gilligan's Island or something. (Have you ever wondered why they brought all that stuff for a three-hour tour)?

On the trail, he quickly fell behind. At some point, he basically just stopped, but he was high up, off trail, and on a dangerous ridge. He stopped in a pretty place, but he was no longer moving towards the goal. That is the idea in mind here. Keep moving. When you sin, are aren't moving, you aren't on the journey, you aren't running any longer. Stop too long, and you may take in the sights, you may just be content with that. Especially if you see weather moving in. You will forget about why you took off on this long journey in the first place.

Colin Sims writes, “The danger lies in sin’s ability to distract the pilgrim from his pilgrimage; sin’s distractions can be to such an extent that they pilgrim fails to reach his destination... note the hostile sense with which the sin

‘entangles’ the actor.”¹¹ This is why *Pilgrim’s Progress* became one of the top five selling books of all time, because it so vividly captured this point. You must endure to the end by always moving forward. And to move forward is, by definition, to put away your sin that so easily entangles you.

Regard Jesus

But where are we going? Our destination isn’t Mt. Everest, but [the celestial mountain](#) where God reigns. We are heading to [heaven](#). But it is even more defined than that. We are heading to Jesus. He is the part that so often gets passed over, especially in this passage. Back to my friend on that other mountain, his weight was just way too much for the little fellow, though he had no idea ahead of time. He became tired and disoriented, and if didn’t have his buddy there to carry all that weight that he was not prepared to take the whole way, I don’t know what would have happened to him. He got himself into a dangerous situation because the weight was too much to bear. He’ll admit just

¹¹ Sims, 7.

how much trouble he got himself into if you talk to him about it. Thank God for his friend who never left his side.

This is where the center of the chiasm and the true end point of Hebrews 11 converge. It is the third thing we are told to do. “Looking to Jesus.” This is the main point of our text. He is our destination. But so much more. He is our helper. He is our destination. He is the reason we travel. He is our beginning. He is our end. In so many ways.

We are to regard him: “Looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith” (Heb 12:2). He is the founder of our faith in two senses. The first is one many do not understand. He gives us our faith. Founder refers to its origin. Notice that faith is not something you create. It is a gift of God (Eph 2:8). So many people tell others, if you will just believe of your own freewill you will be saved. Yes, you must believe. Yes, it must be freely (and it will be when God regenerates you). But you can’t create this in yourself anymore than a dead man can create life in himself. But through the speaking of the gospel by the power of the Spirit, the Word of God creates faith. This is such good news because it means that if he puts it there, he means to do something with it.

The second way he is the founder of our faith has to do with faith's ultimate embodiment. That isn't in Abel or Enoch, Noah or Abraham, Moses, or Daniel. The ultimate embodiment of faith is the Lord Jesus himself. R. Kent Hughes said, "His entire earthly life was the very embodiment of trust in God (2:13). He perfected living by faith. He lived in total dependence upon the Father (10:7–10). It was his absolute faith in God that enabled him to go through the mocking, crucifixion, rejection and desertion—and left him perfect in faith ... The sublime fact is, he endured everything by faith, and thus he is uniquely qualified to be the "author ..." of the faith of his followers."¹²

The word used here (*archegos*) is used of Jesus in other places. He is the *archegos* of life (**Acts 3:15**). Earlier in Hebrews he is the *archegos* of our salvation (**Heb 2:10**). "The term is found in classical Greek for the founder of a city, a chieftain, a first cause or originator of something."¹³ Jesus is the founder of the City With Foundations. He is our chief,

¹² R. Kent Hughes, *Hebrews: An Anchor for the Soul*, vol. 2, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1993), 161.

¹³ I. Howard Marshall, "Acts," in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, UK: Baker Academic; Apollos, 2007), 546.

our captain, and our king. He is God, **the first cause** of all things, the creator of heaven and earth.

He is **the perfect man** who perfectly carried out faith. Hence, he is qualified to be its founder, not just as God, but as man. But not only its founder, its perfecter too. Jesus' embodied life perfectly, so he can be the perfecter of our faith as well. Do you see that his perfect faith qualifies him to make your faith perfect too? This happens in a couple of ways.

First, the faith that he gives to believers is **perfect in quality**. That is, it is real, true, good, and beautiful faith in Jesus Christ. Sure, we have doubts, but doubt is not faith. Sure, we sin, but sin is not faith. Sure, some have a larger measure of faith, but all faith is of the same substance. One drop of pure faith is of the same essence as a whole ocean of it. It all comes from Christ. It is perfect and he considers it as such, which is why he accepts it.

Second, the weak faith we have begins by his grace to weed out the sin in our lives and thus grow. This is why we can obey **vs. 1**. This is why we can look to Jesus. These actions bring our faith to completion. Faith is complete when it gets to the end, when it sees with its eyes what is

now unseen, when the hopes it longs for are realized. The good news again is that Jesus does this for us. He perfects our faith, because he is God and has the power, and because he is man and had perfect faith.

Now, how was his faith brought to completion? Or to put it in the language of Hebrews, how was he “[made perfect?](#)” “[Who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame](#)” (2). The absolutely critical point here is to see [the connection of this language back to the Hall of Faith](#) in the previous chapter. Jesus’ suffering, Jesus’ enduring, Jesus’ despising is the climax of all others’ faith. He is the last in the chain, though we miss it because of a chapter break! Moses considered the reproaches of Christ better than the treasures of Egypt. Jesus for the joy that was set before him endured the cross. We are to look to the cross of Jesus when we consider our faith. He is the ultimate Witness in the Clouds, the very Cloud-Rider himself.

He went up into the clouds at his ascension. And it is the ascension, his victory over sin, death, and the devil, his being seated at the right hand of the throne of God—a major theme already found in Hebrews, that was his prize. Heaven

for Jesus. Heaven for us. Victory for Jesus, victory for us. Kingship for Jesus. Ruling with him for us. In trial and temptation, you are not to look to yourself. You are to look to Jesus who despised sin, endured to death, didn't care about the shame though he was God, and was made victorious over heaven and earth. He has the power to bring you out of your despair. He is God, and it is his Father's pleasure by the Spirit to perfect your faith.

Reflect on Faith

Last but not least, we are to reflect on these things. “Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself” (Heb 12:3). We reflect on Christ and the things we have discussed. “So that you may not grow weary or fainthearted.” Reflecting on Christ is the antidote to the poison of sin. It is his parched thirst becomes our refreshing joy. His soul weary unto death is our victory over faintheartedness.

We all grow tired. We all grow weary. We all have very serious times of testing and trial and temptation to give it all

up, to throw it all away. “Do not let your hearts be troubled,” whispers Lady Wisdom in your ear. “Go now and rest for you are weary with sorrow and much toil.” “Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me,” the Lord Jesus says, “For I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light” (Matt 11:29-30).

We have a great cloud of witnesses testifying that these things are true, through their sufferings and victories, trials and deaths. Let them embolden you in a much greater way that Peter Forsberg spurred me. Throw down your sin. Rid yourself of it. Persevere to the end. Endure. Run your race. Let this be your act of worship every day. Look to Jesus. Regard his sufferings and death and victorious life and ruling ascension. Reflect on the gospel, for it is life. And you will make it to the end. This is God’s promise to you in Jesus.

Postscript (one way to rid yourself of sin):

In a letter to Jonathan Edwards:

I find nothing more conducive to a life of *Christianity*, than a diligent, industrious, and faithful improvement of precious *time*. Let us then faithfully perform that business, which is allotted to us by Divine Providence, to the utmost of our bodily strength and mental vigour. Why should we sink, and grow discouraged, with any particular trials and perplexities we are called to encounter in the world? *Death* and *eternity* are just before us; a few tossing billows more will waft us into the world of spirits, and we hope, through infinite grace, into endless pleasures, and uninterrupted rest and peace. Let us then “run with patience the race set before us,” Heb. 12:1, 2. And oh that we could depend more upon the *living God*, and less upon our own wisdom and strength!—Dear brother, may the *God of all grace* comfort your heart, and succeed your studies, and make you an instrument of good to his people in your day. This is the constant prayer of

Your affectionate brother,
DAVID BRAINERD.¹⁴

¹⁴ Jonathan Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 2 (Banner of Truth Trust, 1974), 436.