

Thought For The Week

Articles: [Looking Unto Jesus ~1700 words](#), [~300 words](#)

Looking Unto Jesus, Part 1 & 2

Running the Race with Eyes Fixed on the Savior

“Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, 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 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.” (Hebrews 12:1-2)

Mike Mathis opened Part 1 by reminding us that the Christian life is not a casual walk in the park—it is a race. Not a short sprint, but a long-distance endurance event marked by hills, headwinds, and moments when every muscle screams for relief. The writer of Hebrews paints this picture for believers who were growing weary under persecution and tempted to drift back to the old ways. The same picture still speaks powerfully to us today.

Part 1 focused on the preparation for the race. First comes the encouragement of the “great cloud of witnesses.” Hebrews 11 had just finished its roll call of faith—Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Sarah, Moses, Rahab, and countless others who trusted God when it made no earthly sense. They are not literal spectators in heaven peering down, Mike clarified, but their recorded lives stand as a mighty cloud of testimony. Every time we open the Bible and read how God came through for them, we hear the witnesses cheering: **Keep running. God is faithful. The same God who carried them will carry you.**

That cloud does not make the race easy, but it makes it possible. It reminds us we are not the first to feel the burn in our legs or the doubt in our hearts. Others have run this same course and finished well. Their stories strip away the lie that says, “No one has ever faced what I’m facing and made it.”

Yet encouragement without action leads to nothing. So the text commands us: “let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us.” Mike spent significant time here in Part 1. Weights, he explained, are not always sinful things. They can be good things—family responsibilities, work demands, hobbies, even ministry activities—that become weights when they keep us from running freely. A weight is anything that slows your spiritual pace or distracts your focus. It might be excessive screen time, unnecessary debt, toxic relationships, or even holding onto past hurts that you refuse to release to the Lord.

The “sin which doth so easily beset us” is different. This is the specific sin that seems custom-designed for your weakness—the one that trips you up time after time. For some it is anger, for others lust, worry, pride, or unbelief. The Greek word picture is vivid: it is the sin that clings so closely it wraps around your ankles like a vine and brings you crashing down. Mike urged us not to negotiate with it. We do not manage besetting sin; we lay it aside through honest confession, genuine repentance, and the power of the Holy Spirit. He reminded us that this is not about earning

God's love—it is about running freely in the love we already have in Christ.

Once the weights and sins are laid aside, the command is clear: “run with patience the race that is set before us.” Patience here is not passive resignation. It is **hupomone**—steadfast endurance, the grace to stay under pressure without quitting. The race is “set before us” by God Himself. Your lane is not someone else's. Your distance, your obstacles, your pace—they are uniquely assigned by a wise Father who knows exactly what you need to become like His Son.

In Part 1, Mike shared how many in our church family are running hard right now—some through health battles, others through financial strain, marital difficulty, or seasons of spiritual dryness. The temptation in every case is to look at the length of the race and grow discouraged. That is why the writer does not end with preparation. He moves us to the only thing that sustains endurance: **looking unto Jesus**.

Part 2 of the sermon series zeroed in on this command like a laser. “Looking unto Jesus” is not a polite suggestion or a nice devotional thought. It is the secret of the entire race. The Greek verb means to look away from everything else and fix your gaze exclusively on Him. It is the same focused stare a runner keeps on the finish line marker, refusing to glance sideways at competitors or the crowd.

Jesus is described with two powerful titles: the **Author** and **Finisher** of our faith. He is the **Archegos**—the Pioneer, the Trailblazer who went first and cut the path through enemy territory. And He is the **Teleiotes**—the Perfecter, the One who brings our faith all the way to completion. Our faith did not start with us, and it will not be sustained by us. It begins in Jesus, continues in Jesus, and will be perfected by Jesus. What liberating news! We are not running to earn His approval; we are running because He has already secured it for us.

Mike then took us to the heart of the verse: “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.” Here is the ultimate motivation. Jesus did not endure the cross because the suffering was pleasant. The physical torment was horrific—scourging, thorns, nails, suffocation. The spiritual reality was even worse: He bore the full wrath of God against our sin. Yet He looked past the agony to the joy on the other side—the joy of a redeemed people, a reconciled family, a bride presented spotless, and the glory of sitting at the Father's right hand.

Because of that future joy, Jesus “endured the cross” and “despised the shame.” He counted the mocking, the spitting, the nakedness, and the criminal's death as nothing compared to the prize. Now He is exalted. The One who ran the hardest race sits in victory. And because He finished, we can finish too.

In both sermons, Mike drove home practical application. Looking unto Jesus is a daily, moment-by-moment choice. When temptation comes, look to the One who was tempted in every point yet without sin. When weariness sets in, look to the Savior who grew tired yet never quit. When shame or failure overwhelms you, look to the One who despised the shame and now intercedes for you at the right hand of God. When joy feels distant, look to the Man of Sorrows who endured for the joy set before Him—and who now offers that same joy to you by the Holy Spirit.

He encouraged us to build habits that keep our eyes on Christ: reading the Gospels to see Jesus clearly, praying with eyes of faith fixed on the living Savior, worshiping with songs that exalt His name, and gathering with brothers and sisters who will point us back to Him when we start to look away. The more we behold Him, the more we become like Him. Sanctification is not self-help; it is Christ-beholding.

Mike closed the combined emphasis with a tender challenge. Some of us have been running with our heads down, staring at our feet or at the problems around us. Others have been glancing sideways at what others are doing or what they possess. Still others have stopped running altogether, sitting on the side of the track exhausted and discouraged. To every one of us the Holy Spirit says the same thing the writer of Hebrews said: Look up. Look away from the distractions. Look unto Jesus.

He is the Author—He started this work in you. He is the Finisher—He will complete it. He endured the cross for the joy of having you with Him forever. He now sits enthroned, ruling over every detail of your race.

So lay aside the weights. Confess and forsake the besetting sins. Run with patient endurance in the lane God has marked out for you. And above all, keep looking unto Jesus.

The cloud of witnesses surrounds us. The finish line is ahead. The Savior who ran before us now runs with us and waits to welcome us home. Let us therefore run—not in our own strength, but with eyes locked on the only One worth running for.

The race is hard, but He is worthy. The hills are steep, but He is strong. The distance is long, but the joy set before us is eternal.

Keep looking unto Jesus. He has never lost a runner yet.

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Looking Unto Jesus

The Key to Running Your Race

“Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, 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 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.” (Hebrews 12:1-2)

In his combined sermons “Looking Unto Jesus, Parts 1 & 2,” The preacher, Mike reminded the church that the Christian life is not a leisurely walk—it is a demanding endurance race. The writer of Hebrews speaks to weary believers facing persecution, urging them not to quit or drift back to old comforts.

Part 1 focuses on preparation. We are surrounded by a “great cloud of witnesses”—the faithful saints of Hebrews 11. Their stories of trust and endurance cheer us on: God was faithful to them; He will be faithful to you. Yet inspiration is not enough. We must “lay aside every weight” and “the sin which doth so easily beset us.” Weights are not always sinful—good things like busyness, comforts, or past hurts can slow us down. Besetting sin is that clinging temptation tailored to our weakness—anger, worry, lust, or unbelief—that trips us repeatedly.

Mike urged ruthless honesty and repentance. Lay them aside through confession and the Spirit’s power—not to earn God’s love, but because we already have it in Christ. Then run “with patience”—steadfast endurance—in the unique race God has “set before us.” Your lane, your hills, your pace are assigned by a wise Father.

Part 2 reveals the secret of endurance: “**looking unto Jesus.**” This means looking away from distractions, problems, and self, and fixing our gaze fully on Christ. He is the Author (Pioneer who blazed the trail) and Finisher (Perfecter who completes our faith). Our race does not depend on our strength but on His.

Jesus Himself ran the ultimate race. For the joy set before Him—redeeming us and bringing us to glory—He endured the cross, despising its shame. The physical and spiritual agony was immense, yet He counted it worth it. Now He sits exalted at God’s right hand, victorious and interceding for us.

When we look to Him, temptation loses power, weariness finds strength, and shame gives way to hope. Build habits that fix your eyes on Christ: Scripture, prayer, worship, and fellowship.

Wherever you are in the race—sprinting, struggling uphill, or catching your breath—look up. Lay aside what hinders. Run with patient endurance. Keep looking unto Jesus, the Author and Finisher of your faith. He who endured the cross for you will bring you safely home.

The cloud surrounds us. The finish line awaits. He is worthy.

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