

Palm Sunday

Hebrews 12:1-3

March 24, 2024 at St. Matthew, Port Washington, WI

Fix Your Eyes on Jesus!

See where he is going

See why he is going

“Look at the bright side. We’ll all have high schools named after us.” It was a veiled attempt at humor. In the 1998 movie, *Deep Impact*, an asteroid was on a path to destroy the earth. A spacecraft armed with nuclear weapons was launched to intercept the asteroid and save the earth. Once they were in space, the crew realized that in order to destroy the asteroid, they would have to explode the nuclear weapons inside a cavern ½ mile wide and two miles deep. But detonating the bombs in that narrow place meant that they would not survive the explosion. They realized that in order to save the earth, they were going to have to die. They would be considered heroes who would have high schools named after them. As Jesus rode on a donkey to the cheers of “Hosanna,” he knew that in order to save the world he had to go inside Jerusalem and that he would have to die. This morning, as we join our Hosannas with the people on that first Palm Sunday, we will want to Fix Our Eyes on Jesus. Pretend that you are a pilgrim in Jerusalem for the Passover and you hear crowds shouting and coming closer as you see Jesus riding by. See where he is going. See why he is going.

See where he is going

There is not a deadly asteroid headed toward the earth, nor will the world end that way, yet our world is dying. Ever since that first sin in the Garden of Eden, our world has been suffering. There are storms, diseases, handicaps, earthquakes. We notice ourselves getting older and slower, with more aches and pains. All of these things are reminders that we and the world are not going to last forever. Destruction and death are coming. And we can’t blame it all on Adam & Eve. If we’re honest, we’ll admit that we’ve been greedy. We’ve been selfish. We’ve lied. We’ve hurt others with our words and hated them in our thoughts. We’ve been guilty of lust and discontentment. We’ve shown that we do not trust God or love him more than anything else. We can say, “Well, nobody’s perfect,” but that’s no defense. The law – God’s law – demands perfection like he is perfect. He looks for loving obedience in everything we think, say and do, but he does not see it. We need a Savior.

And so Jesus rode into Jerusalem. No one else knew what was coming next for Jesus, but Jesus knew WHERE he was going. Jesus would be arrested. He would endure the indignity of a sham of a trial before the religious leaders. He would be paraded between two politicians. Soldiers would mock him, spit on him, and whip him. He would be executed like a common criminal. But that’s not what truly troubled his soul. Jesus knew the agony that was waiting for him on that Roman cross. Worse than the crucifixion itself (which is hard to imagine) would be the weight of the sins of the whole world. Worse than the slow and painful suffocation would be the separation of Jesus from his Father, the punishment for sin. Through his death, though, we have life. Jesus went to the cross as our substitute. His sacrifice on the cross was all the suffering that was needed in order to remove our guilt and rescue us from eternal destruction.

We want to fix our eyes on Jesus, the Savior we need. Jesus is the difference between eternal happiness and eternal hell. But the devil is constantly trying to distract us, to take our eyes off of Jesus, so that our faith grows weaker and weaker until we’ve lost our faith. Faith is not head knowledge. It’s easy for us to lose our faith even though we still may know a lot of Bible trivia. It seems to me that we get most distracted by screens – screens in our living rooms, screens on our desks and screens in our hands. We fix our eyes on our screens, and rarely do those screens focus on Jesus. We need to be careful.

When the author of Hebrews told us to fix our eyes on Jesus, he described him as (:2), “**the pioneer and perfecter of our faith.**” Other translations say, “**the author and perfecter of our faith,**” (NIV ’84). Or, “**the founder and perfecter of our faith,**” (ESV). Or, “**author and finisher,**” (KJV). The idea is that Jesus created (“**pioneered**”) something wonderful for us to have faith in. Jesus is also the “perfecter” because he’s the one who guaranteed that you will end up perfect in heaven.

We are encouraged to fix our eyes on Jesus as Hebrews reminds us that we are (:1), “**surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses.**” Notice that verse 1 begins with the word “**therefore.**” That points us back to chapter 11 which is often called “The Great Faith” chapter of the Bible. Read through it when you get home. You’ll be reminded of believers who have gone before us but are in heaven now. Even though they suffered and struggled in this world, they had their eyes fixed on the promised Messiah. You’ll read about believers such as Abel (murdered by his brother), Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and others. They were

focused on the promised Savior and now they are in heaven. The author of Hebrews urges us to follow their example and take encouragement from their steadfast faith.

In order to follow their example, the author tells us to (:1), **“throw off everything that hinder and the sin that so easily entangles.”** Sin trips us up pretty easily and pretty often. Watch out for it. If there is something you are doing that you know isn't proper, if you are holding a grudge, or visiting dirty web sites, or using foul language, or focusing too much on worldly things, or how much money you have, or how much fun you can have, then – for the sake of your immortal soul and the glory of God – get rid of it. Turn away from your sin and fix your eyes on Jesus. See where he is going. He is going to his death for you

See, also, WHY Jesus is going. As Jesus rode on a donkey toward his death, he was not thinking about having any high schools named after him. He was thinking about you. We understand the concept of enduring something unpleasant for a greater enjoyment later – having surgery to get rid of your hip pain, not going on a fancy vacation so you can afford a new car. Hebrews put it this way (:2), **“For the joy set before him he [Jesus] endured the cross, scorning its shame.”** Fix your eyes on Jesus as he rides into Jerusalem. He is riding to his death for you – not you as a group of people, but you as an individual, someone who is sinful through and through and still he loves you and was willing to sacrifice his life to save you.

Even though Jesus is true God, he is also truly human. He did not look forward to the suffering and pain he was going to endure. He especially did not look forward to being forsaken by God. In fact, he even prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane that he would not have to go through with it all. But there was no other way to save you and so he submitted to his Father's will. His zeal to save you led him to **“scorn the shame”** of the cross. Sure, he was going to be arrested, falsely accused, abused, unfairly condemned, stripped of his clothes, have his back ripped to bloody shreds, have spikes driven through his flesh, be laughed at by the proud and powerful of society and be forsaken by his Father. And yet Jesus scorned it all. “Ha! Big deal. Bring it on.”

After saving us, Hebrews says that Jesus (:2), **“sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.”** There are many Bible passages which make it clear that Jesus did not ascend into heaven in order to sit in an easy chair and just watch the world go by as if he was watching

television. The **“right hand of God”** means a position of power. As true God, Jesus is ruling over the world, making things happen for the good of his body, which is the Church, which is you. That's why the author continued (:3), **“Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners.”** Think about him. Think how much he loves you. Think of what he is doing for you right now, today, to bless you. Fix your eyes on Jesus!

The author of Hebrews compares our journey through life to running a race. He urged us to (:1), **“run with perseverance the race marked out for us.”** The word that is translated as **“race,”** is actually the word **“agony.”** He's telling us that life on this earth is not going to be easy. Jesus knows, far better than any of us, that life on this earth can be tough. As I look at each of you, I can think of difficult times that all of you have gone through. Many of you are going through difficult times right now. I see a lot of eyes that are weary, not just because you don't get enough sleep, or because work or school is stressful, but because of the daily grind of life which makes you feel like you are always walking up a slippery hill and never making any progress. It would be very easy to grow weary and lose heart and give up on Jesus. That's why we want to fix our eyes on Jesus as he passes by on that donkey. We want to see his deep resolve to save us. We want to see that he is going forward to make everything better. We want to join our voices with the crowds on that first Palm Sunday and shout “Hosanna!”

When a woman is in labor and the pain is overwhelming, doctors and nurses encourage them to get a focal point. A focal point is simply something you stare at during contractions. It can be just about anything – a picture on the wall, a teddy bear, a piece of fruit, whatever. God designed our brains so that when you are focusing on something, it leaves you with less brain activity to process the pain. When your brain is focusing on Jesus, it is not processing the pain of life as much. Do whatever you need to in order to fix your eyes on Jesus so that you do not dwell on the sorrow and sadness of things in this life. If you have trouble reading your devotions, tell yourself that you won't eat breakfast or some other meal until you read your devotion. If prayer is a struggle for you, maybe tell yourself that you won't turn on your TV until you say your prayers. Listen to some Christian music while you are working. Whatever works for you. Come to our Maundy Thursday and Good Friday services, and especially Easter. Fix your eyes on Jesus and be saved. Amen.