

Hebrews 12:1-3

The goal of Hebrews 11 is not only testimony, though it is that primarily; it is also exhortation. This is why Hebrews 12 begins with the key word “therefore,” requiring that we deal with the implications of the witness of the OT saints and applying the lessons of their testimony.

Summary

Hebrews 12:1-3, shows that Christians should think of themselves as “surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses” and run with endurance the race that is set before them, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of their faith.

1. Context and Calling of the Christian Life Revisited vs. 1

The author of Hebrews outlines the context for the Christian Life. Believers should think of themselves as “surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses” who bear testimony to faith in the Lord (**Heb 1a**). Christians should hear the voices of these witnesses and conform to the pattern of their faith, not to the pattern of this world. God has marked out a race for believers. Our calling is to “run with endurance the race that is set before us” (**Heb. 12:1c**). This is not an easy calling, and just as athletes in the ancient world trained hard, the author of Hebrews gives believers training instructions (**Heb 12:1b**). The challenging race of a life of faith is not a short sprint. It is a long-distance race, that does not need speed so much as it needs perseverance.

2. Needed Encouragement vv. 2

The author next turns to the needed encouragement in the Christian life “looking to Jesus” (**Heb 12:2a**). The author of Hebrews presents Christ as the founder of the believer’s faith (**Heb 2:10; 6:19–20; 10:20**). He whom God perfected through suffering (**Heb. 2:10**) perfects his brothers and sisters who have placed their trust in him. As originator and perfecter of our faith, Jesus has laid its foundation in our hearts and in time brings our faith to completion (**Heb. 2:11–12; Phil 1:6**).

Therefore, “look to Jesus.”

Jesus endured both the suffering and shame of the cross (**Heb. 12:2**). Believers, then and now, were/are in danger of shrinking back from these very things. Jesus “endured the cross, despising the shame,” persevering to his appointed end and thus entering into his glory in heaven and now “is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. This provides an example for us (**1 Pet 2:21**).

Jesus is also our example in spiritual joy (**Heb. 12:2; c.f. John 4:34**). Believers should rejoice at trials, because by enduring we gain the crown that waits beyond the cross (**James 1:2–3**).

The encouragement of “looking to Jesus” is vitally important in such a difficult race.. Those who fix their gaze on the world and the things of the world will be conformed to its pattern. Those look to Jesus will find themselves transformed into his likeness (**2 Cor. 3:18**). Unless you look to Jesus in faith, you will never know eternal life, and though you may enjoy this world for a season, there will be no crown for you at the end, but only the judgment of God.

3. Cured Weariness vs. 3

Here the author of Hebrews anticipates a problem and prescribes its cure (**Heb 12:3**). From time to time Christians grow weary and become downcast. The cure for this is to consider Jesus in His own struggle with the opposition of the world.

In **vs. 2**, the exhortation is to look away from one thing to another. Here in **vs. 3**, the author uses a different word, which means “to consider intently.” We should reflect on, take stock of Jesus’ life and death as it relates to our own struggle. We are to remember that beyond the cross there lies a crown; it was so for our Lord, and so it will be for us (**Rom. 8:18**). That is the cure for our hearts when we grow weary in the long race of this life of faith.

How do we consider Jesus? By reading what the Bible says about Him. In the Gospels, we read about what Jesus said and did and how God delivered him. The Epistles explain the significance of Christ’s life, death and resurrection. In the OT, we see Christ in his Person and work, under various types and symbols.

In Luke 24, we see two downcast disciples walking from Jerusalem to Emmaus on the day that Jesus was resurrected. They were weary and had lost heart (**Luke 24:17**).

This is how Jesus finds us sometimes, discouraged and standing still instead of running the race. Jesus cured their weariness of soul by pointing them to Himself in the Scriptures (**Luke 24:27**). What Jesus did for them, we are to continue to do, seeking and finding Him and contemplating His Person and Work in the Scriptures. When Jesus and the disciples arrived at their destination, Jesus revealed himself to the disciples and then disappeared. The two disciples, now greatly encouraged, marveled not at this supernatural experience but at the things they had heard of Christ in the Scriptures (**Luke 24:32**).

This is what believers today will find when our hearts have grown cold on the long and sometimes difficult race that is our calling as Christ’s disciples. We open the Scriptures and Jesus teaches us of Himself, no less than He did for those two disciples, and as we consider Him in his life, death and resurrection, our hearts too are warmed and even burn within us.

If you want to live that way, with that kind of joy, then you must look to Jesus, not on this world or anything in it, and consider how great a Savior He really is.