

We ought to Look up to Jesus.

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Proverbs

4:25 Let your eyes look directly ahead; fix your gaze straight in front of you.
4:26 Carefully measure the paths for your feet, and all your ways will be established.
4:27 Do not turn to the right or to the left; turn your foot away from evil.
[International Standard Version]

Hebrews

12:1 Therefore, having so vast a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, and throwing off everything that hinders us and especially the sin that so easily entangles us, let us keep running with endurance the race set before us,
12:2 fixing our attention on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of the faith, who, in view of the joy set before him, endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.
12:3 Think about the one who endured such hostility from sinners, so that you may not become tired and give up.

Matthew

4:1 After this, Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.
4:2 After fasting for 40 days and 40 nights, he finally became hungry.
4:3 Then the tempter came. "Since you are the Son of God," he said, "tell these stones to become loaves of bread."
4:4 But he answered, "It is written, 'One must not live on bread alone, but on every word coming out of the mouth of God.'"
4:5 Then the devil took him to the Holy City and had him stand on the highest point of the Temple.
4:6 He told Jesus, "Since you are the Son of God, throw yourself down, because it is written, 'God will put his angels in charge of you,' and, 'With their hands they will hold you up, so that you will never hit your foot against a rock.'"
4:7 Jesus responded to him, "It is also written, 'You must not tempt the Lord your God.'"
4:8 Once more the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world, along with their splendor.

4:9 He told Jesus, "I will give you all these things if you will bow down and worship me!"
4:10 Then Jesus told him, "Go away, Satan! Because it is written, 'You must worship the Lord your God and serve only him.'"
4:11 So the devil left him, and angels came and began ministering to him.

I have entitled today's sermon, "We ought to look up to Jesus." Let us discuss two things today: the danger of looking at things in the wrong way and the blessing that comes when we look at things in the right way. Jesus explained the will of our Father God in John, 6:40;

John

6:40 This is my Father's will: That everyone who sees the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him to life on the last day.

Looking up to Jesus refers to believing in him sincerely. It is to entrust everything on him. I would like to begin the discussion from these words in verse 12:2 of Hebrew, "Fixing our attention on Jesus."

We were all saved by the unconditional love and grace of the Lord. However, we were not saved just to be saved, but we were saved purposely to work for his reward, as repeatedly stated in the Bible.

This purpose, this reward, is extremely important for us. If we read the entire Bible, we will see that the direction to reach this goal and receive that reward is shown to us in there.

It is not clear who wrote the Epistle to the Hebrews, although it was most likely Paul. In this letter, the writer taught all believers that they had to keep moving forward. He still demands that we walk forward in every action in our daily lives.

Furthermore, the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews, not only encouraged the people to move forward, but also guaranteed that they would unquestionably reach their goal. Jesus himself first walked the path that leads to this goal and has now entered the glory which is far beyond our imagination.

Jesus humbled himself to experience all kinds of pain, and the agonies of human beings, before he won his victory and was raised up to the glory of His Father. Thus, we can be certain that eventually we will reach that same great place. Jesus is the victor and nothing is impossible for him. And, the only thing we as his followers need to do is, after all, to look up to our Lord Jesus, and fix our attention on him.

Hebrews

12:1 Therefore, having so vast a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, and throwing off everything that hinders us and especially the sin that so easily entangles us, let us keep running with endurance the race set before us.

In this passage, he is telling us, not just to run, not just to pray, but to keep running. While we keep praying, the devil cannot touch us. In this, we ought to have a firm conviction that we will never fail to accomplish the purpose of the Lord.

We have to pay attention to this one thing. As a matter of fact, the Old and the New Testament mention the tragic possibility of failing to accomplish this purpose. We were saved and were granted eternal life, which will never be lost.

We are the eternal ones. However, there is still a possibility that we fail to accomplish our purpose and thus, we will not be rewarded. Are we succeeding in this respect in our lives? Or, are we failing to accomplish this purpose?

Whether we succeed or fail depends on where we direct our gaze. What are looking up to? On what are our eyes fixed? As I just mentioned, I would like to start with a discussion of five wrong ways of viewing the situations in our life.

These are one- to look back over your shoulder, two- to look around in anxiety, three- to have short-sighted thinking, four- to have a self-serving way of viewing things, and finally five- to analyze ourselves. These are all wrong ways of looking at our lives, whereas the consequence of looking at our lives in right way are unimaginably rich blessings.

Let us begin with looking back over your shoulder. Jesus said in Luke 9:62, "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the Kingdom of God." This was what the people of Israel actually did.

Psalms

78:41 They tested God again and again, provoking the Holy One of Israel.

Why couldn't the people of Israel enter the land of Canaan, but instead were left to wander through the wilderness for forty years? Why couldn't they bear any fruit? Why did they have no victory, no joy, no consolation, no praise, and no gratitude?

It was all because they looked back over their shoulder. The heavy burden Paul carried in his mind

for saved people was that they never stopped looking back. For this reason, Paul had to write this epistle to Galatians.

Believers in Galatia were beginning to look back over their shoulders. Believers of Judaism encouraged those who accepted Jesus to convert back to Judaism. Looking back didn't mean that they were pursuing worldly desires again, returning to Atheism, or trying to forsake their faith in Jesus.

For the people who lived in Galatia in those days, looking back refers to turning back to legalistic Judaism, which was cold and lifeless. Believers were invited to share in the fullness of Jesus. And, had those believers in Galatia returned to the lifelessness of Judaism, they would have never shared in this fullness.

Their faith would have been far different from the spiritual life that would meet the intention of the Lord. Believers in the Galatia of those times kept looking back and did not seem to have any intention or motivation in moving forward. They remained at the same place.

It was a serious problem whether the brothers and sisters in Galatia would internally advance or spiritually retreat. It was because of the desperate desire and heartfelt prayers of Paul that they do not look back, and instead move forward. It was exactly what Paul wrote in his Epistle to Galatians. Now, let us look at ourselves. How are we doing in this regard? Are we looking back in our lives? When we look back, doubt arises, which gives the devil a chance to win. We should always remember- every time we look back, we are actually denying Jesus.

The second wrong way of viewing things is to look around in anxiety.

Isaiah

41:10 Don't be afraid, because I'm with you; don't be anxious, because I am your God. I keep on strengthening you; I'm truly helping you. I'm surely upholding you with my victorious right hand."

The people of those days must have been encouraged when they heard and accepted these words of promise. Needless to say, these words were not written for the Jewish people alone. They were meant for each one of us.

In the original Bible, this verse begins with "don't look around anxiously." In the Bible we use, it is simplified to be "don't be afraid" or "don't be anxious." Why do we look around so often? Peter was one of those who

looked around anxiously. While he was walking on the water, at the moment when he took his eyes off Jesus and looked around, he began to sink into the sea as we can see in these famous verses.

Matthew

14:28 Peter answered him, "Lord, if it's you, order me to come to you on the water."

4:29 Jesus said, "Come on!" So Peter got down out of the boat, started walking on the water, and came to Jesus.

4:30 But when he noticed the strong wind, he was frightened. As he began to sink, he shouted, "Lord, save me!"

4:31 At once Jesus reached out his hand, caught him, and asked him, "You who have so little faith, why did you doubt?"

The Israelites too looked around anxiously. Among the twelve spies who were sent to explore the land of Canaan, ten looked around with anxiety and feared the heavily protected city of Canaan and the giants dwelling in there, while the other two, Joshua and Caleb looked up to the Lord alone and could enter the land of Canaan, as is clearly recorded in the Old Testament.

In the end, the people of Israel believed the ten frightened spies and consequently they failed to enter the land of Canaan. It was only the two people I mentioned who could enter this promised land. This shows us that we should never look around in anxiety. The Lord has already saved us. The Lord has been leading us all along.

Of course, we suffer from various troubles and pains. However, we should not allow such ordeals and pains to tie us down and keep us away from obedience to the Lord. "Let our eyes look directly ahead. Fix our gaze straight in front of you." Let us not look around in anxiety."

The third wrong way is to have short-sighted thinking. This is another dangerous and wrong way of seeing things. Very often, it puts us in danger of being preoccupied with present worries where our lives are ruled by something we are facing each moment. When we become short-sighted, and our eyes are fixed on the problems surrounding us, we will never be able to accomplish the purpose of the Lord.

Very often, we look at the situation at hand and become perturbed. We even give ourselves up to despair. This is the short-sighted way of viewing things, and it is our major weakness. We can't help but focus on unsolved problems or pain of each time. We surely suffer from various pains and troubles.

However, these do not mean the end of our lives. The problems surrounding us are obstacles to our growth, which are referred to as "everything that hinders us and especially the sin that so easily entangles us" in Hebrews, 12:1. Our present situation may be imposing a heavy burden on us, which makes us feel so hopeless and desperate.

This is exactly the sin that entangles us: a short-sighted way of viewing things that causes us danger, anguish and setbacks. But, when we hear the words, "Let your eyes look directly ahead and fix your attention on Jesus." We are not just encouraged, but we are actually commanded to keep our focus on him. With the Lord in our sight, our present agonies are absolutely meaningless.

Our real concerns should revolve around the invisible spiritual reality rather than worldly things. We shouldn't be trapped in personal ordeals. Problems will arise one after another in our lives and they will never end. However, our problems are like "stomachaches," which are not critical at all. The pains that the Lord Jesus suffered should be what are occupying our minds.

1 Peter

4:12 Dear friends, do not be surprised by the fiery ordeal that is taking place among you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you.

4:13 Instead, because you are participating in the sufferings of the Messiah, keep on rejoicing, so that you may be glad and shout for joy when his glory is revealed.

Peter sent these words to many people of those days who were in agony and we would do well to remember them in our own times of trouble.

Fourthly, it is of course wrong to have a "self-serving way of viewing things." Paul wrote in his epistle to Philippians, 2:4, "do not be concerned about your own interests, but also be concerned about the interests of others." It is such a self-centered attitude to be concerned only about our own interests, and it is not acceptable for believers to live such a self-serving life.

As a part of the body of Jesus, we are responsible for brothers looking away from Jesus, or sisters who are stuck in sins. It is clearly written that we should not just be concerned about our own interests, but also be concerned about the interests of others.

What then is the point of this verse? It is that when you face a particular problem, you do not need to worry about its impact on your life. Very often, we are prone

to be apathetic about a situation unless it causes some harm to ourselves. However, when we see saved people suffering from worries, becoming disobedient to God, or looking away from the Lord, is it the right thing to do to remain apathetic to them?

We should not be concerned just about our own interests. It is the wrong attitude to simply care about yourself or to be concerned only with your own benefit. Caring only about yourself is the quickest way to wreck your life.

The fifth wrong way is to “analyze ourselves,” as Paul warned us in his epistles. What is the purpose of our life? If you keep looking inside yourself, you will be led into a spiritual backset. Why do we gaze into ourselves? Is it because we believe that there is something inside us which makes the Lord satisfied? Or do we want to please ourselves by looking at what we own? This, needless to say, is one of the wrong ways to look at yourselves.

If we concentrate too much on our own lives, it will lead us to distress and consequently, to despair. Nothing good dwells inside of us. We need to be aware of this fact. Let us stop expecting something good to come out of us. “Let your eyes look directly ahead; fix your gaze straight in front of you” and “please fix your attention on the Lord Jesus.”

So far, we have seen the wrong ways of seeing things. Now, let us think about the blessing that comes when we fix our gaze on Jesus alone.

The choice of what to look at is extremely important for us. The author of “the Epistle to the Hebrews” explained the importance of paying respect to the privilege granted to the believers and summarized it in the verse 12:2; “Fix your attention on the Lord Jesus.” We ought to look up to Jesus.

Nothing is more important for us than to look up to Jesus. In the original language that the Bible was written, this verse, “fix your attention on Jesus”, has a stronger connotation. It means to look away from all other things and fix your gaze on nobody but Jesus. In this, we should avoid looking back at by-gones or being captivated by the worldly things surrounding us. Instead of just looking at your present concerns or gazing at yourself, let us keep our eyes on the Lord Jesus alone.

What we look at has a deep impact in our lives. Our eyes keep looking around. Our eyes never stop pursuing worldly satisfaction. Contrarily, Jesus is telling us to “Let our eyes look directly ahead and fix our gaze straight in front of us.”

Where is the goal of our life placed? In which direction are our eyes directed? Are we taking a real look at heavenly goals? Or, are we focusing our eyes on earthly or worldly ones? If our eyes are looking at heavenly things, it will give us the strength to drive our faith forward.

The secret of spiritual growth is to set our eyes toward heaven. For this reason, it is written, “Let your eyes look straight ahead, fix your gaze directly before you.” The purpose of the Lord cannot be seen in eyes but they are eternal, as we can see from these verses.

2 Corinthians 4:17

This light, temporary nature of our suffering is producing for us an everlasting weight of glory, far beyond any comparison.

4:18 because we do not look for things that can be seen but for things that cannot be seen. For things that can be seen are temporary, but things that cannot be seen are eternal.

What was the purpose of Paul of writing these words to the brothers and sisters in Corinth? He was compelled to let them know the truth. Are we looking at what continues into eternity? Are we living a life that fulfills the purpose of the Lord?

The devil makes all attempts to keep us away from accomplishing the purpose of the Lord, to keep us tied down to earthly things, and to make us pursue worldly aims. It is our common experience that the devil often leads us to be captivated by matters that are irrelevant to the purpose of the Lord so that we fall into paralyzed states.

Let us pray and ask the Lord for our lives to be ones which fulfill his purpose and intention. At this moment, you may be bound by human relations and don't know which way to turn. If so, just think of the purpose of the Lord and look up to Jesus.

If you are suffering from personal relationship problems, and they are standing in the way of accomplishing the purpose of the Lord, these relationships should be severed immediately. If you have no idea as to what is going to happen in the future, then why don't you contemplate the purpose of the Lord and look straight up to Jesus?

You may be at a complete loss as to where and how to serve the Lord in the future. If so, please simply look up to the Lord. You may be caught in worries now, which make you deeply distressed. However, to resolve your concerns, you should first contemplate how you can fulfill the intention of the Lord and how

you will accomplish the purpose of the Lord.

Please look into the purpose of the Lord instead of your own distress. Please look up to Jesus through all your agonies, troubles and sufferings. We ought to aim at transforming our entire lives to fulfill the purpose of Jesus. Let us pray so that we understand the purpose the Lord by the inspiration from above and live our entire life to perfectly match this purpose.

It is written, "Let your eyes look straight ahead." Do we truly understand the purpose of our Lord? Have we truly realized the importance of churches of the Lord to the Lord God? Do we know how much, as the bridegroom, Jesus loves and adores the bride, who is represented by true churches?

In fact, we all worry about something. Unresolved problems build up in our lives. Our sufferings continue and never seem to cease. Furthermore, the devil whispers into our ear; "Your aim is too high. Why don't you compromise yourself and be satisfied with what you have now?" But, we should at no time be satisfied with what we have. If we get satisfied with what we are now, there will be no blessing.

What is the intention of the Lord? It was in the Ephesians that Paul explained this purpose of the Lord in the finest detail:

Ephesians

3:10 He did this so that now, through the church, the wisdom of God in all its variety might be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realm

3:11 in keeping with the eternal purpose that God carried out through the Messiah Jesus our Lord.

We ought to look up to Jesus. Let us look away from all else and just gaze at Jesus. When the devil presented and promised all the wealth of the world to Jesus, he adamantly rejected it. Instead, he kept walking ahead with his eyes fixed on the purpose of the God in heaven.

The devil offered all things in this world to Jesus to keep him away from Crucifixion. However, the eyes of Jesus were directed fixedly before him. I will finish this sermon by reading this verse from Hebrews again;

Hebrews

12:2 fixing our attention on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of the faith, who, in view of the joy set before him, endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

The Lord Jesus was only concerned about the purpose of his Father God in heaven. How about us? Let us too look up to Jesus high above.

End