

# Good Friday 2024

## The Joy Set Before Him

March 29<sup>th</sup>, 2024

Hebrews 12:1-2

Rev. Levi denBok

### **Introduction:**

Good morning, Redeemer and Simcoside. Please turn there with me in your Bibles to Hebrews 12.

An old Scottish theologian once said:

The cross is a window opened into the very heart of God.<sup>1</sup>

I think that is exactly right, but the unfortunate reality is that sometimes we look through that window and do not see what we are meant to see. His heart is unchanging, but our vision is frequently blurred and obscured.

Some people look to the cross and think that they see a God who is vindictive. Some people look to the cross and think that they see a God who is malicious. Some people look to the cross and – rather than seeing a God who had made a way for us to come home – they see a God who is so deeply disappointed with us that He wants nothing to do with us at all.

This distorted view of the heart of God often comes to light as we partake of communion. Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper to serve as a visible, tangible reminder of his grace. As we eat the bread and drink the cup, we are meant to taste something of the LOVE of GOD who has made a way for sinners like you and me to become children of God!

And yet, it has been my experience that many Christians refuse to partake of this gift because they don't feel worthy to receive it. They don't think that God wants them at the table.

---

<sup>1</sup> Thomas F. Torrance as quoted by Graham A. Cole, *God the Peacemaker - How Atonement Brings Shalom*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009), 47.

Brothers and sisters, that is a tragedy. The cross IS a window opened into the very heart of God, and my prayer for us this morning is that we will be helped by Him to see all that we are meant to see. To that end, look with me now to Hebrews 12:1-2. Hear now God's holy, inspired, inerrant, living and active word to us today:

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, <sup>2</sup> 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. (Hebrews 12:1-2 ESV)

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

Our text this morning begins with a call to *endurance*. It begins with the reminder that the Christian life often resembles an exhausting marathon. I suspect that some of us are feeling that even this morning.

But we are not the first to run this race. The heroes of the faith who went before us are like a great coliseum of witnesses, cheering us on as we cast off our sin and put one foot in front of the next. The text calls us to lay aside every weight, and every sin, and to RUN with endurance with our eyes fixed on Jesus!

There's a sermon that could be preached about any one of those details, but we are going to focus our attention this morning on verse 2. I must confess that I have probably read this verse 1,000 times, but there is a detail in this passage that I somehow skimmed over in the past, and it is a detail that *profoundly* shapes what we should see as we look again to the cross. I want to ask a very simple, and a very important question this morning<sup>2</sup>:

### What Is The "Joy" That Was Set Before Jesus?

Look again at verse 2:

---

<sup>2</sup> In my preparation for this sermon, I was greatly influenced by chapter 3 of Dane Ortlund, *Gentle & Lowly* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020).

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. (Hebrews 12:2 ESV)

Why did Jesus endure the cross? This is one of those times where one little word makes a world of difference. The text says that he endured the cross “*FOR* the joy that was set before him.”

*On account of joy; because of joy; FOR JOY*, Jesus endured the cross! Do you see that?

And that raises this question that I had never stopped to ask. What is this “joy” that was set before Jesus?

For years and years, I simply assumed the answer. Maybe you have done the same. I *assumed* that the “joy” that enabled him to endure the cross was the joy of heaven! I assumed that Jesus was willing and able to push through his suffering because he saw GLORY on the other side!

But *is* that what this passage is teaching? Is the joy of heaven the joy that Jesus was focused on? Look again with me at verse 2. We read:

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.** (Hebrews 12:2 ESV)

What was on the other side of the cross according to this verse? What was the end result?

Jesus seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

But what about that brought Jesus joy? Was he simply tired and looking forward to sitting down and putting his feet up? Was he missing his Father, and eager to be next to him? Was he excited about the honour that would come with that position? How can we answer this question with any level of certainty?

Thankfully, the author to the Hebrews answers the question for us. All throughout this letter, he explains why it is so significant that Jesus is seated at God’s right hand. Look, for example, at Hebrews 8:1. There we read:

Now the point in what we are saying is this: **we have such a high priest, one who is seated at the right hand of the throne** of the Majesty in heaven (Hebrews 8:1 ESV)

Jesus is seated at the right hand of the throne of God *so as to serve as our high priest!* He is seated at the right hand so that sinful, lost, weary people like you and me *can have access to the throne of grace through him!* In fact, every time the author to the Hebrews talks about Jesus being seated on the throne, it is *always* connected to Jesus' ministry of forgiveness. In chapter 1, he explains:

After making purification for sins, **he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high** (Hebrews 1:3b ESV)

We see the same thing again in chapter 10, verse 12:

But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, **he sat down at the right hand of God** (Hebrews 10:12 ESV)

Do you see that? Jesus made purification for our sins – he offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins – and then he SAT DOWN at the right hand of the Father. He sat down because his work was done! It is finished!

THAT is what he saw on the other side of the cross. THAT was the end game. And so – returning to our question – what is the “joy” that was set before Jesus? One pastor put it simply:

The joy of seeing his people forgiven.<sup>3</sup>

Think about that for a moment. Jesus wasn't simply looking forward to glory. He wasn't simply looking forward to the new heavens and the new earth. That wasn't the vision that was filling him with joy as he marched to the cross.

Let me put this in the simplest language possible: The joy that was set before him that enabled him to endure the cross was JOY of ministering forgiveness to you and me!

---

<sup>3</sup> Dane Ortlund, *Gentle & Lowly* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020), 39.

This shouldn't be surprising, because Jesus taught this way all the time. In Luke 15, after Jesus told the parable of the lost sheep and how the shepherd rejoiced when he had found it, Jesus concluded:

Just so, I tell you, there will be more **joy in heaven** over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance. (Luke 15:7 ESV)

There is JOY IN HEAVEN when we confess our sins and lay hold of God's grace! Jesus is SO HAPPY when we come to him and ask for forgiveness! Do you believe that? I think Jesus recognized that we would have trouble believing this, so he went on in the very next breath to say:

Or what woman, having ten silver coins, if she loses one coin, does not light a lamp and sweep the house and seek diligently until she finds it? <sup>9</sup> And when she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin that I had lost.' <sup>10</sup> Just so, I tell you, **there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents.** (Luke 15:8-10 ESV)

Let me ask you again: Do you believe this?

I want to ask you some diagnostic questions this morning. In the quiet of your heart, do your best to answer these as honestly as you can.

After you sin, do you hide from God?

After you sin, do you try to punish yourself?

After you sin, do you try to work your way back into His favour – do you try to do enough to *make Him like you again* before you feel like you can come to Him in prayer?

If the answer to any of those questions was yes, then you are not yet seeing the glory of the cross.

Or consider these diagnostic questions:

After you have asked for forgiveness, do you assume that God must be shaking his head at you in disgust?

After you have asked for forgiveness, do you assume that Jesus is saying something like: “I can’t believe that she sinned like that *again*... How many times will she make the same mistake? How many times do I need to listen to her pleas for mercy? How much grace does she need?”

Imagine spending hours upon hours preparing a meal for your children. You choose all their favourite ingredients. You spare no expense. Having finished your work, you call out a warm invitation, and then you take your seat.

But the kids don’t come. Your son eventually sneaks toward the table but then he pauses and slowly turns away. You can hear him weeping to himself, “I don’t deserve this. This can’t be for me.”

So, you issue the invitation again,

“Come to me!”

And eventually, that same child sneaks back to the table. He looks up at you sheepishly and asks, “Is this really for me?”

“Of course it is! Take and eat!”

When he finally sits down, and he takes a bite, and he smiles, and he looks up at you, what do you feel?

JOY!

Brothers and sisters, there is a FEAST that has been laid out for us! Jesus has purchased it, and he has prepared it, and he is seated at the Father’s right hand ready to serve it, and he has invited us to come, and it brings him SO MUCH JOY when we receive it!

You think he shakes his head at you when you come to him and confess your sin? You think he shakes his head at you when you come to him asking for grace? It brings him JOY!

He loves you.

He loves you.

He really, truly loves you.

The Christian life is a marathon – it really is. But there is a secret that will enable you to run this race.

Look to Jesus. Behold him there enduring that cross and despise that shame for the JOY that was set before him! The joy of sitting at the right hand of the Father and serving as your high priest. The joy of cleansing you from your sin so that you can finally come home. Look to JESUS!

It is only when you see him – it is only when you understand this grace – that you will be enabled to press forward in the life that God has saved you to live. A great old preacher once said:

What the New Testament tells you to do always, in the first instance, is to forget yourself all together – to forget all your problems, your temptations, your difficulties, everything else; to forget yourself and look at the Lord Jesus Christ.<sup>4</sup>

As we come to the Lord's Supper this morning, if you are looking in faith to Jesus then this is for you. If you have confessed your sin and received his grace, then this is for you. If you believe that Jesus died on that cross for your sins, then this is for you.

The high priest who finds JOY in forgiving you, has laid out this feast before you.

**Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace**, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need. (Hebrews 4:16 ESV)

We are going to take a moment now in reflection, and then Ron will come forward to pray for us.

---

<sup>4</sup> Martin Lloyd-Jones, *Romans – An Exposition of Chapter 6 – The New Man* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1972), 98.