

The Incomplete Yet Forward-Looking Faith

Hebrews 11:40 God having provided something better for us, that they should not be made perfect apart from us.³

God had reserved **something better for us**. He had arranged **that they should not be made perfect apart from us**. They never did enjoy a perfect conscience as far as sin was concerned; and they will not enjoy the full perfection of the glorified body in heaven until we are all caught up to meet the Lord in the air (1 Thess 4:13–18). ¹³

The spirits of OT saints are already perfect in the presence of the Lord (Heb. 12:23), but their bodies will not be raised from among the dead until the Lord returns for His people. Then they will enjoy the perfection of resurrection glory.²³

To put it another way, the OT believers were not as privileged as we are. Yet think of their thrilling triumphs and tremendous trials! Think of their exploits and their endurance! They lived on the other side of the cross; we live in the full glory of the cross. Yet how do our lives compare with theirs? This is the cogent challenge of Hebrews 11.³³

A Large Crowd of Witnesses

Hebrews 12:1 Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, ⁹

We must bear in mind that Hebrews was written to people who were being persecuted. Because they had forsaken Judaism for Christ, they were facing bitter opposition. There was a danger that they might interpret their suffering as a sign of God's displeasure. They might become discouraged and give up. Worst of all, they might be tempted to return to the temple and its ceremonies. ¹⁹

They should not think that their sufferings were unique. Many of the witnesses described in chapter 11 suffered severely as a result of their loyalty to the Lord, yet they endured. ²⁹.

If they maintained unflinching perseverance with their lesser privileges, how much more should we to whom the better things of Christianity have come.³⁹

They surround us as a **great cloud of witnesses**. This does *not* mean that they are spectators of what goes on on earth. Rather they witness to us by their lives of faith and endurance and set a high standard for us to duplicate.⁴⁹

This verse invariably raises the question, "Can saints in heaven see our lives on earth or know what is transpiring?" The only thing we can be sure they know is when a sinner is saved: "I say to you that likewise there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine just persons who need no repentance" (Luke 15:7).⁵⁹

The Christian life is a race that requires discipline and endurance. We must strip ourselves of everything that would impede us. 69

Weights are things that may be harmless in themselves and yet hinder progress; they could include material possessions, family ties, the love of comfort, lack of mobility, etc. In the Olympic races, there is no rule against carrying a supply of food and beverage, but the runner would never win the race that way.⁷⁹

We must also **lay aside ... the sin which so easily ensnares us**. This may mean sin in any form, but especially the sin of unbelief. We must have complete trust in the promises of God and complete confidence that the life of faith is sure to win.⁸⁹

We must guard against the notion that **the race** is an easy sprint, that everything in the Christian life is rosy. We must be prepared to press on with perseverance through trials and temptations.⁹⁹

Hebrews 12:2 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 has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. 6

Throughout the race, we should look away from every other object and keep our eyes riveted on Jesus, the foremost Runner. 16

A. B. Bruce comments: One stands out conspicuous above all the rest ... the Man who first perfectly realized the idea of living by faith ..., who undauntedly endured the bitter suffering of the cross, and despised the ignominy of it, sustained by a faith that so vividly realized coming joy and glory as to obliterate the consciousness of present pain and shame.²⁶

He is the author, or pioneer, of our faith in the sense that He has provided us with the only perfect example of what the life of faith is like.³⁶

He is also the finisher of our faith. He not only began the race but finished it triumphantly. 46

For Him the race course stretched from heaven to Bethlehem, then on to Gethsemane and Calvary, then out of the tomb and back to heaven. At no time did He falter or turn back. 56

He kept His eyes fixed on the coming glory when all the redeemed would be gathered with Him eternally. This enabled Him to think nothing of shame and to endure suffering and death. Today He is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.⁶⁶

Hebrews 12:3 For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls. 2