

Keep Your Eyes on the Goal

by Anton Bosch

This sermon emphasizes the importance of staying focused on the ultimate goal of becoming like Jesus, despite the challenges, distractions, and temptations that come our way. Drawing from the examples of Jesus and Paul, the speaker encourages the audience to endure with patience, keep their eyes fixed on Jesus, and run the race set before them. The goal is to be conformed to the image of Christ, to finish the course with faith, and to receive the eternal reward awaiting those who love His appearing.

Scripture: Isaiah 50:4, Luke 9:51, Philippians 3:12, 2 Timothy 4:7, Romans 8:29, 2 Corinthians 4:16, Hebrews 12:1

Topics: "Focus on Christ", "Endurance in Faith"

Description

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Transcript

Welcome to members of Sun Valley Community Church and our friends from other parts of the world who are joining with us again this morning on YouTube and on Facebook. We really miss being together. Today is the ninth week that we are dark, that we have not been able to gather together and we still don't know how long it's still going to be.

It's still probably going to be weeks, probably months before we can get together, but we're very grateful for the technology so that we're able to communicate by means of technology at the very least. So let's open in prayer. Father, we come to you in the name of the Lord Jesus and we pray that you would be present in this meeting today where we are recording, but Lord also that you would be present in each house and each place where people are watching and listening to this message.

We pray, Lord, that by your Spirit you would teach us and by your Spirit you would deal with our wills and give us grace, Lord, to be doers of your word and not just hearers only. And so I do pray for your presence, Lord, wherever this video is being watched and whenever it's being watched. And I pray above all for your help in delivering this message today.

I pray this in Jesus' name, amen. So we're going to read from the Old Testament, from Isaiah chapter 50, verses 4 through 9. This is one of the prophetic passages or messianic passages in the Old Testament, speaking about the Lord Jesus. And as we read through this, you'll see how the Lord Jesus appears or is spoken of, particularly in the crucifixion in this passage.

So, Isaiah chapter 50, and reading from verse 4. The Lord God has given me the tongue of the learned, that I should know how to speak. A word in season to him who is weary. He awakens me morning by morning.

He awakens my ear to hear as the learned. The Lord God has opened my ear, and I was not rebellious, nor did I turn away. I gave my back to those who struck me, and my cheeks to those who plucked out the beard.

I did not hide my face from shame and spitting. For the Lord God will help me, therefore I will not be disgraced. Therefore I have set my face like a flint, and I know that I will not be ashamed.

He is near who justifies me. Who will contend with me? Let us stand together. Who is my adversary? Let him come near me.

Surely the Lord God will help me. Who is he who will condemn me? Indeed, they will all grow old like a garment. The moth will eat them up.

And so my text is from verses 6 and 7 this morning. And clearly this speaks about the Lord Jesus at the whipping post, and then as they judged him and brought him to trial, and then ultimately to the cross. He says, I gave my back to those who struck me, and that speaks of his willing submission to what they did to him in order to do and fulfill the will of God.

And my cheeks to those who plucked out the beard. I did not hide my face from shame and from spitting. And then he says, For the Lord God will help me, therefore I will not be disgraced.

Therefore I have set my face like a flint, and I know that I will not be ashamed. And I want to speak about the middle part of that verse, therefore I have set my face like a flint. I have set my face like a flint.

And I suppose that if you're not familiar with the scriptures, or particularly with the Old Testament, this may seem like a strange verse to speak about. What he is speaking about is that the Lord Jesus had adamantly set his eyes on the goal for which God had brought him to the earth. And obviously the purpose of it all was for him to die on the cross.

I think that we understand that, yet some people seem to feel that it was for him to live as a man, for him to preach those wonderful sermons, like the Sermon on the Mount, to perform miracles and all of those things. But those things were incidental to the purpose for which he came. The purpose for which he came was so that he would die on the cross in our place, and shed his blood that we might be cleansed and that we might be born again and come into a relationship with God.

And so what he is saying then is that he has set his face, he has set his purpose on God's purpose. He is going to do the will of God no matter what. Flint is a very, very hard stone, and while most of the desert around Jerusalem and Israel is sandstone, there are little ridges of flint.

And flint is one of the hardest stones, outside of diamonds and those kinds of things. And when you strike flint with an iron, it makes sparks, and of course from that we used to get lighters, cigarette lighters, and before that even little boxes where people had a piece of flint and a piece of iron and they would strike them together and make a spark and then begin to make a fire. And so he has set his heart, his face, determined to do the will of God, unswerving, nothing was going to break that, nothing was going to change that.

He was going to go to the cross no matter what. And then of course this is picked up in the New Testament if we go to Luke chapter 9 and verse 51. And this is just before the cross, and it says it came to pass, that's Luke 9, 51, now it came to pass when the time had come for him to be received up, that he steadfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem.

So it's not using the word he set his face as a flint, but again the same determination. He is now going to the cross. Now this was not just in the last weeks of Jesus' life.

The whole of Jesus' life from the day he became aware, and we don't know how that awareness developed, but what we do know is that when he was 12 years of age he began to have an understanding of the will and the purpose of his father. And so from the day he became aware that he was going to be crucified, that he would have to die that atoning death for us on the cross of Calvary, from that day he had set his face towards that purpose of God. He was not going to be deterred, he was not going to be turned to the left or to the right, he was going to do the will of God no matter what.

So here he is in the last weeks of his life, and he is now on his journey to Jerusalem to be crucified. And so he says then that he steadfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem. So everything he was doing on this journey was incidental to the purpose, and the purpose was to get to Jerusalem.

He had to get there a week before the time in order to fulfill the prophecies that he might be examined for a week and then be sacrificed. And so he's passing through Samaria and verse 52 said, and he sent messengers before his face, and as they went they entered the village of the Samaritans to prepare for him. So he's looking for somewhere to overnight as he's journeying along, and he sent some of his disciples and they come to the village of the Samaritans.

Now remember Jesus had a good relationship with the Samaritans even though most of the Jews didn't. And so he intended to stay there that night. You remember there was that woman of Samaria who got saved as a result, and I'm just using that language liberally, as a result of Jesus meeting her at the well.

And then because of her testimony and because of his preaching after that, many people in the city got saved or became believers then. And so he sends his disciples or some of his disciples and he says, well, you know, prepare a place for me, for us so that we can spend the night, and then the next day probably they would move on to Jerusalem. But then it says they, the Samaritans, did not receive him because his face was set for the journey to Jerusalem.

And so they were upset because he wasn't willing to spend time with them. Why are you going to Jerusalem? Of course there was some politics in here because they would have their own Passover separate from the Passover in Jerusalem, and they had hoped that he would be there for their Passover rather than the Jews' Passover in Jerusalem. That was all part of that.

But Jesus is determined, and not even his friends, and these are predominantly his friends in Samaria, not even they will dissuade him from doing the will of God. He says, I'm going to Jerusalem and I'm going to fulfill the will of God no matter what. If we go on a few more chapters in Luke to chapter 12, and I'm just jumping in the middle of again a whole sequence of events, but Jesus says, I have a baptism to be baptized with and how distressed I am till it is accomplished.

Now remember that Jesus is not talking about water baptism here. He had been baptized by John three years before. So this is not water baptism.

This is not baptism of the Spirit because when he came out of the water at John's baptism, the Holy Spirit came upon him in the form of a dove. So what baptism is he talking about? He's talking about suffering. He's talking about the cross and he is saying, I have to go through.

And remember this word of baptism means to be immersed, to be placed under, to be dumped. And so he understands that what is waiting for him is that he is going to be immersed in suffering, the most terrible suffering that we cannot even begin to understand as they would beat him and as they would pluck the beard from his face, as they would spit upon him as we've read in Isaiah, and then ultimately crucify him on the cross. And of course, the physical suffering was one thing, but the spiritual suffering, emotional suffering as he takes the sin of the world upon himself and as the Father turns his face away from him, we can't even begin to imagine what all of that was.

And he says, I'm going to be immersed in this suffering. I'm going to be immersed in all of those things that are going to happen to me during that time. And he says, I'm distressed until it is accomplished.

Now, I don't believe he is saying that he is disturbed about what is waiting for him. Obviously, he wasn't looking forward to that in a masochistic way, in the sense that there was some kind of perverse pleasure in suffering. Obviously, that's not true.

But what he is distressed about is that there is this job that has to be done and he needs to get it done. And he says, I'm perturbed, I'm disturbed, I'm distressed because it needs to get done and I need to get there. And so again, he has set his face as a front to Jerusalem.

He's going to do the will of God no matter what. Now, the problem is that in doing the will of God, there are many things that come against us and against him. And I'm going to look briefly at Paul as well today.

That seek to hinder us from doing the will of God. And of course, remember that there was an agenda from hell itself to prevent Jesus from dying at the cross. If Jesus didn't die on the cross, well then there would be no hope, there would be no salvation, there would be no atonement, there would be no church, it would all be for nothing.

And the devil knew that it didn't matter how many miracles Jesus performed, how many sermons he preached. If he didn't get to die that atoning death on the cross, then he would fail in his mission. Now, I know some people say, well, he could not have failed.

Well, in a sense, he could not have failed. But was the devil going to not try? Yeah, the devil tried and he tried in many ways. And I want us to look at just four, and there are others, but I want to look at just four things that the devil used to try and stop Jesus from getting to the cross.

And you'll see that he uses the same things for Paul, and therefore he will use the same things for us. And so we have a goal. Jesus had a goal and his goal was the cross.

Paul's goal was different. Our goal is very much more similar to that of Paul. But the opposition to us achieving that purpose is the same, whether it's Jesus or whether it's Paul or whether it is us.

Some of them are of more significance to Jesus than to us. The first one maybe doesn't apply to us that much, but it certainly did to Jesus and to Paul. And that was an early death, that if Jesus could be killed, and remember that it wasn't just about him dying, but it was about him dying on the cross and atoning death in our place.

If Jesus just died from some kind of disease or in some accident, well, that would not atone for our sins. He would just have died. But he had to die at the cross.

And so from the very beginning, you remember that Herod set about killing all the babies in an effort to find or in that process to catch, find Jesus and to kill Jesus in that process. A number of times in Jesus's ministry, there were attempts on his life. Remember there was one occasion when he was preaching in the synagogue and then they drove him out to a hill and they determined to throw him over and he just quietly went away and disappeared from them.

And so there were a number of attempts on the life of the Lord Jesus. And obviously, if he could be killed, then the will of God could not be accomplished. I think that there may be Christians today who are very concerned about dying, about dying because of the COVID-19 virus and the kinds of things that are happening in our world today.

Well, I take comfort that Jesus could not have died before the cross. He could not have died because the will of God had not been accomplished, that there is some divine protection on him and on Paul and on us until we have fulfilled the will of God, until we have done what God has determined for us to do. Now, it doesn't mean that we don't fail and that we cannot not achieve the goal.

Obviously, we can do that. That's a very real possibility. But if we're in the will of God and we're doing what God has called us to do, he will not allow anything to happen to us until the work is done.

And I take great comfort in that as I get older, not knowing when I will die and when the Lord will take me. But I do have tremendous comfort in the fact that nothing will happen to me until the Lord's time has come. And so, even at the whipping post, I believe that the devil had a last attempt at trying to kill Jesus.

Many men died as they were beaten by the Romans. And remember, this is not 49 stripes as is oftentimes portrayed. The 49 stripes was a Jewish limitation.

The law in the Old Testament said not more than 50 stripes. And so, in case they miscounted, they limited it to 49. Jesus was not limited to 49.

The Romans beat him until they had had enough. And many men died at the whipping post. And I'm sure the devil would have selected the biggest, strongest soldier he could have found.

And the beating was absolutely merciless. And if the devil could have caused him to die at that point, it would have happened. But Jesus survives.

He gets through that. And then, obviously, he is crucified. There are the temptations.

And remember that the temptations of the Lord Jesus were, yes, at one level, personal. The temptation to turn stones into bread for him to eat. But those temptations were far more than personal.

Those temptations had to do with a goal. The goal was that Jesus had come to die an atoning death in order to gain the world. And so, the devil offers him alternatives to the cross.

Turning stones into bread, the alternative of building his kingdom on bread. And right now, there's a world power that is going around, handing out food to everyone in Africa, handing out masks, handing out aid to every nation in Africa, every third world nation. And of course, the purpose is to gain and to build a kingdom.

And so, the devil knew that people would follow Jesus if he turned stones into bread. I mean, they wouldn't have to ever work again. They wouldn't have to worry about food again.

Jesus would just turn stones into bread. Cast yourself down from the pinnacle of the temple. And of course, there was a temptation to build his kingdom on the spectacular.

And many preachers today are trying to build their kingdoms on the miraculous and the spectacular. And Jesus says, no, that's not the way I'm going to build the kingdom. I'm going to build the kingdom by the atoning death on the cross of Calvary.

And then, of course, there was the temptation to fall down before Satan and to kneel down before him and to worship him. And the devil says, I'll give you the kingdoms. And it seems that the devil had the power to give the kingdoms to Jesus, that they were in his control.

And of course, again, the temptation is to say, well, the ends justify the means. I've come to get the world. I've come to get the souls of men.

So, why do I have to go that way? Maybe I can do it this way. But Jesus says, no, I'm going to do it God's way. I'm going to the cross no matter what.

So he is tempted to bypass the cross. He is discouraged. And there are a number of times when you see Jesus being discouraged at what was going on.

You remember Lazarus' tomb, as Jesus weeps because of the unbelief of those who were his believers, those who were his disciples. And they just don't believe in the resurrection, including Mary and Martha, who were of his most intimate friends. Jesus is discouraged and weeps because of the unbelief of people that he has spent so much time ministering in.

And yet he continues and he perseveres to the cross. And then, of course, there are diversions. Some other distraction.

We talk about rabbit trails, running after rabbits over here and over there instead of chasing what we should be chasing. And so there is that temptation. There's the temptation for Jesus to get involved in the miracles.

And you remember that he performs miracles. And then they say, well, you know, just stay here and perform miracles for us. And he says, no, that's not what I've come to do.

And you remember that even Peter, when Jesus reveals the cross to Peter, when he asked Peter or he asked the disciples, who do men say I am, who do you say I am? Peter says, you're the Christ. And Jesus says, well, flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my father in heaven. And then he begins to reveal the cross.

Up to then, the disciples didn't understand the cross, didn't understand that Jesus would suffer and die. But he now begins to reveal the cross. And the moment he speaks about the cross, Peter said, don't do it, Lord, far be it from you.

So his own friends are there to dissuade him from doing the will of God. And Jesus says to Peter, those infamous words almost, I suppose, get behind me, Satan. Jesus is not interested in the advice of his friends.

He's going to do the will of God, no matter what. And of course, finally, he dies on the cross. And in John chapter 19, verse 30, so when Jesus had received the sour wine, he said, it is finished, and bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

He had done the job. He had paid the price. Remember this word, it is finished, meaning the price is paid.

It's over. He's not saying I'm finished. No, the job is finished.

The price has been paid. The job of atoning for our sins, the job of reconciling man to God had been done. And the job was finished.

And now he finally dies. Now the end comes. Now, if we have a look at Paul, we're going to see, and I won't spend so much time on Paul, but you'll see some of the pattern in Paul's life.

And I'm going to go just to two scriptures for Paul. The first is in Philippians chapter 3, verses 12 to 14. And in Philippians, Paul really tells us his drive, his motive.

Jesus set his face towards Jerusalem. He set his face as a flint. He was going to be undeterred and do the will of God.

Now, Paul says, not that I have already attained or am already perfected. He says, I haven't achieved the purpose or the goal, but I press on that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus also has laid hold of me. So Paul is saying, Jesus grabbed hold of me.

He arrested me. Remember on the road to Damascus. And he arrested Paul.

He grabbed hold of Paul for a purpose. And he saved Paul for a purpose. And he saves us for a purpose.

He doesn't just save us for the sake of saving us, but he has a purpose for us. And I'm going to talk about just one aspect or one part of that goal that he has for us. But Paul says that the Lord Jesus has grabbed hold of me.

And he says, now that he has grabbed hold of me, I need to grab hold of that goal for which he has saved me. And I need to do that which God has called me to do. And then verse 13.

Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended, to have grabbed hold of, to have achieved. But one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead.

Now in this context, Paul is talking about his past achievements.

He's talking about his achievements as a Jew. His birth and his education and his rising to prominence amongst the Jewish teachers. And he says, I count those things rubbish.

He says, I forget about those things. Those things don't matter. At this time, this is fairly late in Paul's ministry, he could have been looking back at his achievements in the ministry, the churches he had planted, the many people who had been born again as a result of his testimony, the many times he had defended the faith.

He could look at those things and say, well, you know, we've done a good job. He says, that doesn't matter. That's past.

It's what lies ahead that matters. And you know, sometimes I think that we can so easily get stuck in the past. We get stuck in disappointments and the failures of the past, and that prevents us from moving forward.

But sometimes we rest on the laurels of our past achievements and what we have done in the past. No, forget what's behind. There is something ahead of us, and we need to move towards that goal and that purpose.

And so he says, I press towards the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. Now, here's the question. What is the goal? What is the prize? And I believe that the goal and the prize for Paul is the same as for us.

It's easy to look at Paul and to say, well, for Paul, it was the ministry. But Paul understood that it was not about the ministry primarily. The ministry was secondary.

What it was about was him being conformed to the image of the Lord Jesus Christ. We're going to see that verse in a moment in Romans 8, verse 29. That really is the purpose.

Paul says, I'm looking to that day when I will be like Jesus. That is the goal. And so he says, I forget about what's behind.

I grab hold of that goal that I might become like the Lord Jesus. I press towards the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. And then he comes to the end of his life, and we looked at 2 Timothy.

We just touched on 2 Timothy last week. And in 2 Timothy 4, verses 7 and 8, he says, and remember I said last week, this is right at the end. This is weeks probably, maybe even days before his execution.

And he says, I have fought the good fight. I have finished the race. I have kept the faith.

And so here he's talking about his ministry and he's talking about his Christian life. And obviously Paul speaks about this fight. He speaks about the struggle against, not against flesh and blood, but against principalities and powers against demon forces.

He says, I have fought the good fight. I have finished the race. And he says, I have kept the faith.

That's the goal really in one aspect. One aspect of the goal is for us to finish the race and to keep the faith. And then he says in verse 8, finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the

righteous judge, will give to me on that day.

And not to me only, but to all those who love his appearing. Now, if I go back to verse 7, I want you to see two important things here. I have fought the good fight.

I have finished the race. And the Greek word for finished here is the same Greek word that is used. Now, remember when Jesus died on the cross, he cried out tetelestai in his dialect.

But the Greek translation, if you look at John in the Greek, the Greek translation uses the same word for finished as Paul uses for finished here. And the word simply means complete or done. And Paul says, I have finished the race.

I have done what I need to do. I made it to the goal. And he says, I have kept the faith.

Now, Paul had the same hindrances, the same things to try and keep him back. And remember that there were attempts on Paul's life, particularly near the end. But even during his ministry, remember one time they stoned him and dragged him out on the ash heap and threw him out of the city, left him there for dead.

But the next day, I believe he rose from the dead. We can't be sure. The scripture doesn't say that he was dead, but it seems that he pretty much was.

And yet miraculously, he's able to get up the next day and he continues his ministry. So there are attempts on Paul's life. And then obviously, remember from the day that he enters into Jerusalem, from the Jews begin to conspire against him.

They lure him into a trap and the Romans rescue him and he appeals to Caesar. And even then there are further attempts on his life all the way along until eventually he gets to Rome and eventually until he finishes the race. So the same attempts on his life are being done in the same way as Jesus was protected until he had finished the work in the same way Paul was protected.

And obviously, as I've said, we will be protected in the same way. Paul was tempted. He doesn't talk much about those temptations.

And remember that temptations are different for different people. But Paul speaks about the temptation of pride. And he definitely had a struggle in that area.

I don't believe there's a single Christian or a single preacher who doesn't have a struggle or a temptation of pride. I guess some don't have a temptation because they've given into the temptation. They don't even fight it anymore and they just go with building their own ego and their own reputation or whatever.

But Paul says that the Lord gave me a thorn in the flesh for what purpose? To keep me humble. And so Paul understands the struggle of pride. And that's why he speaks in Philippians about the fact that he forgets what's behind because it's so easy to become prideful over what God has done in us and through us and for us in the past.

Paul says, no, forget about those things. It's the job that lies ahead. I have finished the race.

I have kept the faith. The next thing is discouragement. And of course, Paul has the same problem with discouragement.

And you remember that he speaks about the trials that he had experienced. He'd been shipwrecked. He'd been without food.

He'd been beaten with rods. He'd been beaten in different ways. But he says, beside all of these things, all of these physical assaults that I have had upon my body.

And he says, because he says in my body, I carry the marks of my testimony. The marks of my obedience to the Lord. But he says, those things are nothing.

He says, in comparison to that which comes upon me daily, the care of the churches. The care of the churches. And when you look at Paul's relationship with the Corinthians and how he struggles over their disobedience, over their following of false teachers, you can see the discouragement.

At one point, Paul just gives up almost and he leaves the city because he understands that he is not getting anywhere. At another time, he was waiting for a report from Corinth and he was supposed to be preaching. And he gives up preaching for a few days because he is so disturbed about what's going on.

These things were discouraging. These things were difficult and hard for Paul. And yet he perseveres through all of them that he might be able to fulfill the will of God.

Were there diversions for Paul? Yes, there were many diversions. Many attempts to get him into something that he shouldn't have been involved in. To get involved in Judaism.

To set up some kind of central office in Jerusalem and become one of the great apostles in Jerusalem. And Paul says, no, I'm not interested in those things. I have a mission and my mission is to preach to the Gentiles.

And so he does the will of God. He has not diverted from his purpose. A few times during his ministry, he is tempted to go into areas that God had not called him.

And he quickly understands, no, that's not where I'm supposed to be. I need to get back to where God wants to be. And so he doesn't turn to the left or to the right.

And ultimately when he is faced with going to Jerusalem and Paul has an understanding, because remember there were some prophecies and Paul obviously had some kind of revelation from God that he would go to Jerusalem and ultimately from there he would go to Rome. And so his friends come, very much like Peter did with Jesus. His friends come.

And one of those men was a man called Agabus. And he takes Paul's belt and he ties his hands with Paul's belt. And he says, Paul, this is what's going to happen to you if you go to Jerusalem.

They're going to capture you and that's going to be the end. But Paul says, what are you doing with making it difficult for me? I have to do the will of God. And remember that part of his journey back to Jerusalem, the final time, he goes past Ephesus and he calls the elders of the church in Ephesus.

And he says to them, look, I'm going to Jerusalem and you're never going to see me again. This is the end of the road for me as far as you are concerned. And they plead with him, they beg with him, they're weeping and they're saying, Paul, just don't leave us.

And Paul is undeterred. He's going to do the will of God and he pursues the will of God right up to the end. Now, if we look at ourselves, what is the goal? And obviously we can look at different things and we can say, well, you know, maybe my goal is to become a preacher or my goal is to become a good at my job or to be a... No, we have one common goal and there may be sub-goals, there may be sub-purposes in our lives, but there is one common goal.

And I've already told you what that is, Romans 8 verse 29. For whom he foreknew, he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Now, there are all sorts of complications here about the foreknowing and predestined.

We're not going to get into that, obviously, but the point here is that those who he has saved, let's just use that language because I believe that that's what it's saying, that those who are saved, he is predestined, he is determined, he has called us to be conformed to the image of his son, to become like Jesus. And remember that verse 28, the previous verse is the verse that everybody knows, that God works all things to the good to them that love him and are called according to his purpose. What is his purpose? His purpose is that we become like Jesus.

That is the goal. And for me, it came as a great revelation, actually not that long ago because I believed that my purpose in life was to be a preacher. I believed that God had called me even before I was born again when I was 16.

Even before that, I knew that God had called me. And this was my destiny. This was my purpose.

This is what I live for is to preach and to teach the word of God. And then one day I realized, no, that's not what it's all about. What it's about is me becoming like Jesus.

The purpose of everything is not preaching. The purpose of everything is God shaping me into the image of his son. And the thing that we're going through right now that the whole world and that Christians across the world are going through right now has one purpose.

And we can worry about all of the conspiracy theories. We can worry whether is this the devil? Is this the end times? Where does this come from? What is the purpose? Yes, there is a purpose. And for the Christian, the purpose is that he is shaping us to become more like Jesus.

The nine weeks that we've gone through and the however many weeks that we still have before we can meet is all part of the process of making us to become like the Lord Jesus. That is his purpose. That is the primary purpose in everything that we touch, everything that we do, everything that affects us is for this one purpose that we might become like the Lord Jesus Christ.

He has predestined us, he's determined, he's set that goal before us that we might become like the Lord Jesus. But just like with Paul and with Jesus, there are those same things that seek to take us away from the goal, that seek to get us distracted. There could be an attempt on our life and I don't think that that would necessarily be physical.

If you're in a missionary on the mission field, then that could be physical. But for most of us, it is spiritual. The devil is trying, remember he goes about as a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour.

That the thief comes to rob, to kill and to destroy. The purpose of the devil or his purpose, his goal is to destroy the work of God, to destroy you and me. But we are protected as long as we're working towards

that goal.

As much as the devil could not kill Jesus before he made it to the cross or Paul before he had witnessed before Caesar, they were divinely protected. We are divinely protected as long as we're working towards that goal and towards the purpose of God in our lives. And then of course there are the temptations and we face those temptations every day.

Temptations to get involved in sin, temptations to do what we shouldn't be doing, temptations not to do what we ought to be doing. And so there are those temptations all the time and the temptations all the time come down to one issue. Am I going to do the will of God or am I going to do what I want to do? And remember that that really was the heart of the final temptation of the Lord Jesus.

Remember that there were those three temptations in the wilderness but then there was a final temptation in the garden of Gethsemane. And there he struggles with his will, not my will, but your will be done. And I'm speaking about his will as a man.

Obviously he was God in the flesh but he's now kneeling there on that rock as a man. And as a man he says, I don't want to go to the cross. If there's some other way then find it.

But he says, not my will but your will be done. And so that's where the temptation, the real temptation is. That's where we struggle with the will of God.

And it's in doing the will of God that we need to overcome that temptation. And yes, sometimes it has to do with sin but many times it has to do with disobedience. It has to do with doing what we want to do when in fact the Lord wants us to be doing something different.

And as we find ourselves in this time of lockdown there are many temptations to do things that may not be sinful or wrong in themselves but take us away from what God is trying to do in our lives. I believe that he has given us this time to spend time in his presence, to spend time in his word, to spend time meditating on the things of God, to spend time getting our lives straight before God, in order before God. And there's a temptation, well let me just watch a bit more television, let me just do this, let me just do something else.

Those temptations seek to distract us from the goal and the purpose of God in our lives. Of course there's discouragements and I think that this is a particularly discouraging time for all of us. It's a discouraging time for me as a preacher.

It's very hard to lead a church without being able to see anybody, to preach without a congregation. But the temptations to become discouraged are very real. We are communal people.

We're people who are used to interacting with other people. We're not isolationists. And I joked the other night that I thought I was an introvert and I've discovered that I'm not.

I need people. We all need people and we become discouraged when we don't have interactions with people. When we can't see people, when we can't hug people, when we can't shake people's hands and all of those kinds of things.

It's a time of discouragement. Let's not allow discouragement from deterring us from achieving the purpose of God, particularly in this time. And then of course there are diversions.

The diversions are probably the most dangerous of all of them. The problem with diversions is because those diversions may well be very good Christian, godly, biblical things. But they are not what God wants us to do.

Performing miracles and preaching, was there anything wrong with that? No, there was nothing wrong with that for Jesus. But if he spent the rest of his life just doing miracles and preaching great sermons, he would have failed in his purpose. And so the devil would be very happy to have him preach for the next 50 years until he died of old age, as long as he didn't get to the cross.

The devil is very happy to get us involved even in Christian stuff, watching Christian movies, watching Christian television, as long as we don't get down to the nitty gritty, as long as we don't get down to the real issue of our relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. Preachers particularly are tempted to get so involved in the ministry that they themselves are not having a personal relationship with the Lord. And the devil is happy for preachers to preach, as long as that preacher himself doesn't walk with God.

And so the temptations are real. The temptations to build our own kingdom, temporary kingdom here. Remember Jesus takes his three of his disciples up into the Mount of Transfiguration and they say, well, let's build some three huts here.

We just want to stay here. This is wonderful. And Jesus says, no, I've got a job to go and do.

I have a cross to go to. And so sometimes we just want to do that which seems to be spiritual, but in fact is not really the purpose and the will of God for our lives at that time. And so it's very important then that we discover what is it that God is actually wanting me to be doing at this time, at this time of isolation, at this time as we wait to be able to come together again.

And not just at this time, but for the rest of my life that we might grab hold of that goal. And I pray that we may be able to come to that understanding of saying, there is one thing that I want and that is to be like Jesus. In fact, that is one thing I want.

Yes, I want to be a good steward of the grace of God. I want to be a good preacher. I want to be a good pastor.

But above all, I want to be like Jesus. That is our goal and that is the thing that he has saved us for. And that is what we need to strive for.

In 2 Corinthians chapter 4, in verse 16 to 18, therefore we do not lose heart even though our outward man is perishing. In other words, we're getting old, we're dying, we're getting sick. Yet the inward man is being renewed day by day.

In other words, that's the important part, what is inside and not what is outside. For our light affliction, our light affliction, and I know that some people look at our present situation and we say, well, this is not easy. Paul says it is light.

And remember, in Paul's context, he is talking about being shipwrecked. He's talking about being beaten. He's talking about being stoned.

He's talking about going without food. He speaks about being in perils of his own countrymen and perils of the strangers. He says that is our light affliction, which is but for a moment.

In other words, it's passing away. And our lock-in or stay-at-home order will pass away. It seems that it's never going to happen.

It'll happen at some stage or the other. They'll let us out and we can resume some kind of normalcy, whatever that's going to look like at the time. But it is a moment, obviously, in the light of eternity.

It may seem like forever now, but in fact, in the light of eternity, it's just temporary. And he says those things are working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory. Now, here's the important part of this verse, or that I want to focus on very briefly.

While we do not look at the things which are seen, but the things which are not seen. So Paul sees the goal that God had set before him, and he says, I grab hold of that goal. And he says it's important that we see that which we don't see, that is not seen with a natural eye, but the things which are not seen.

For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal. And then I want to go to the last scripture in Hebrews chapter 12, and I've quoted this verse a few times in the last few weeks. 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.

We spoke about being ensnared last week. And let us run with endurance the race that is set before us. So Paul says, I have run the race, I've finished the course.

Now the writer to the Hebrews says that there is a race that is set before us. Each one of us has a race. God has a purpose, God has a plan for our lives.

We need to run that, but we need to run it with endurance. I think we all know the story about the rabbit and the tortoise, that the rabbit beat the tortoise because the, sorry, the tortoise beat the rabbit because the rabbit thought, oh well this is easy, I'm just going to take some time out and take a break. And he fell asleep and the tortoise won.

Unfortunately, so many Christians are running the wrong race. They're not in the race they're supposed to be. Others have given up and they're resting and they're just sitting on the side and just watching the world go by, watching the church go by.

And they've given up on the race. But he says, let's run with endurance or patience in the King James, the race that is set before us. Looking unto Jesus, the author and the finisher.

So there's our goal, the Lord Jesus. Let's have our eyes on him. I remember when I was still doing a lot of backpacking in wilderness areas and navigating with a map and a compass.

One of the things that I learned that you had to do was you had to find a landmark, a mountain or a hill over there that was in the route and the direction you wanted to go. And you had to fix your eyes on that landmark and work towards that. And yes, there may be deviations.

You may have to go over here to cross the river. And maybe you take a break over here. But your eye is always on that goal because that's where I need to get.

And then obviously from there, you would take the next sighting. But so he is saying then, our eyes need to be on Jesus. And we've said it so many times in these last weeks, our eyes are not on the politicians.

Our eyes are not on the doctors. Our eyes are not on anything that's out there. Our eyes are on Jesus.

That's the goal. Yes, there's going to be opposition. There's going to be temptations.

There's going to be things coming against us. But let's get our eyes on Jesus and let's follow him. And so looking unto Jesus, now he's not just saying Jesus, but he's reminding us of what Jesus did and what he will do.

He's the author and the finisher of our faith. And this is what Jesus did, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame. We're coming back to Isaiah now, despising the shame and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Jesus overcame. And he's saying, now keep your eyes on me. When you want to get discouraged, remember me.

Remember what I endured. In fact, this is the reality that whenever I think things are hard, whenever I think that the struggle is difficult, I remember Jesus. I remember what he endured in the garden of Gethsemane, what he endured at the whipping post, what he endured at the cross of Calvary and that he overcame.

And he's saying, keep your eyes on me. Let's get our eyes off the world. Let's get our eyes off ourselves and feeling sorry for ourselves.

Let's get our eyes on the goal and let's make it. Like Paul says, I've run the race. I've finished the course.

There's only one thing left, and he says, and that is to receive that crown, which the Lord is going to give to me, Paul says, but to all those who love his appearing, let's get our eyes on Jesus and let's move towards that goal. Father, we thank you for your word. We thank you for the example of the Lord Jesus and the example of Paul.

And so Lord, that you're not asking us to do what others have not done before us. And in fact, Lord, when we look at what Jesus endured and what Paul endured, what we are called to endure is absolutely nothing in comparison. And yet, Lord, we get so easily discouraged.

We get so tired. We get so frustrated. We're so easily diverted.

But Lord, I pray that you'd help us to be those who endure to the end. Lord, I pray that you would be, help us to be good friends to those fellow brothers and sisters in the body of Christ, that we would not be like Paul's friends and Jesus's friends who didn't want him to do your will because they had selfish interests. Lord, help us to be good friends and to encourage one another along this way, that we might be able to reach the purpose for which you have saved us.

I pray, Lord, that you'd fix that goal in our hearts and minds. And Lord, that we may not chase rabbits, that we may not chase false goals and mirages here and there and all sorts of other things. But Lord, that we might chase you with all of our heart.

I pray this in Jesus' name. I pray that you'd go with us, Lord, and for each one who is watching, I pray that your blessing may rest upon them. And Lord, above all, that we may put this.

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