

# His Only Begotten Son

by G.W. North

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*The sermon emphasizes the importance of faith, hope, and looking to Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, in our lives.*

**Scripture:** Hebrews 10:36, Hebrews 11:1, Hebrews 12:1

**Topics:** "Faith", "Perseverance"

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## Description

G.W. North emphasizes the importance of faith and hope in the Christian life, urging believers to focus on Jesus rather than the trials and tribulations they face. He explains that while the promise of Christ's return is certain, it is not dependent on human expectation but on God's perfect timing. North encourages the faithful to live by faith, drawing strength from the examples of Old Testament saints while ultimately looking to Jesus as the author and finisher of their faith. He highlights that true faith is not merely about receiving promises but about enduring and running the race set before them with patience and perseverance. The sermon serves as a reminder that perfection in faith is attainable through a relationship with Christ, who exemplified faith in His life and death.

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## Transcript

Possibly the Hebrews may have thought that because the Lord was coming for 'those that look for Him', as the writer said, they were perfectly right to expect Him in their lifetime for they had been looking for Him so long and were now tired of looking. So, having referred them to Jesus and His repetition of David's prophetic words, 'Lo, I come to do thy will O God', the writer says to them, 'after ye have done the will of God ye might receive (the fulfilment of) the promise'. He is both honest and wise, he does not say, 'ye will certainly receive the promise', but holds out hope, 'ye might receive the promises. He was writing by the Spirit, he was not making false promises. The promise was given to hope; the hope of the faithful heart is that though it see death it should die in faith, for 'he that shall come will come, and will not tarry'. When He comes it will be for all those to whom and for whom the promise was made, the majority of whom have died in faith since the day the promise was made. When the time of the promise comes, (and that is calculated to the very moment of time) He will not tarry another second, but will come.

There is not the slightest evidence or reason to believe that because a man is looking for the Lord to come He will come. His coming will not depend upon the watchfulness of His people, but upon the decision made by His Father, and will fit in with God's great plan of the ages. When He comes He will certainly catch up all those who do look for Him, and all those who have looked for Him: both those who have lived

and are living by faith in glorious hope, and those who have both lived and died in faith without realising that hope. Although it is true that God makes and keeps His promises, we all must learn to live by faith in Him and not by faith in a promise, lest we mistake His promise or miscalculate the time of its fulfilment, or misappropriate something never intended for us. Faith in Him, whatever happens, however much may be understood and whatever may be the calculations or miscalculations, will keep saints walking on in the pilgrim way and running the race unhindered. We are directed to the fact that men must live by hope as well as by faith, because that is how Christ lived.

Drawing upon the words of David and applying them to Jesus, Peter, speaking on the day of Pentecost, made this plain, 'My flesh shall rest in hope'. The Lord died in hope by faith. He neither believed nor hoped that He would not see death; His hope lay beyond the grave. Part of the fulfilment of the plan of salvation lay in what He would do during those days of physical death. His plan for those days included a personal visit to hades, wherein a great unnumbered multitude of persons were held in captivity. Who these were, when they had lived, what they had done and how long they had stayed in hades we are not told, nor for our purposes here does it matter. Though unnamed and undescribed, it would appear that most, if not all, of these persons were human, for they had to await the coming of a human being to release them. Had they been spirits only, that is, not ever having had a human body, nor been a human soul, it seems most logical to think that they would not have needed the great Human Being to come and minister to them. David once said that if he made his bed in hell God's Spirit would be there, so obviously Jesus did not have to descend into the place of the dead persons because God could not get in there; there is no place of hiding away from Him.

Little enough information is given about what went on when Christ went down to these persons, but perhaps it may be rightly assumed that one of the prime purposes of this visit was to show Himself to them and preach the gospel among them. Certain it is that a multitude responded to Him, for when He ascended up on high He led them out and away up with Him to heaven. It must have been glorious! 'In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye' He was changed and caught up to the throne, and then He came back again for people to touch Him, handle Him, see Him. This is why we are all told to look unto Jesus; this is as important as looking for Him; quite possibly it is more, perhaps even very much more important to do this than to look for Him. This is the emphasis made in the twelfth chapter where the writer continues his theme by making a very striking contrast, pointing out the great difference between all those worthies of the Old Covenant and the one incomparable Lord Jesus Christ of the new.

Great though all those famous elders of the race were, they and all the people are referred to as a 'great cloud of witnesses', an unusual description to be sure, by contrast Jesus stands out alone so unique that it would be remiss not to refer to Him. The inference to be drawn from this is that we must not, under any circumstances, for any reason or for one minute of time allow them to become the great concentration of our lives. These Old Testament worthies, great though they were and worthy of praise, must not fill our thoughts or becloud our vision of Jesus; beside Him, significant though they are, all pale into insignificance. They, their lives and their exploits only have meaning as they are related to His life and exploits. The point being made is, seeing that the Lord Jesus was not caught up to heaven and home until He had endured the cross, none of God's children ought to think that they should not also stay here and endure the cross and all that it implies as well. The inference from the statements in chapter ten is that the Hebrews were drawing back from the persecutions that they were undergoing. 'The patient waiting for Christ', as Paul puts it, had given way to intolerance; endurance had worn thin. They were giving up the fight; joy and confidence and assurance had deserted them and they had well nigh lost their faith. There

were many pressures upon them; some had suffered greatly, but so had thousands before them: at bottom it was not this: because the promise of the Lord's return had not been fulfilled, false expectation had turned sour on them. What a pity that they should have made such a mistake; by doing so they stood to lose so much, if not everything. How timely then is this letter with its massive faith content and great emphasis upon suffering. It was written in the hope that its message would strike home to hearts before it was too late for them to recover themselves.

Moving from chapter eleven to chapter twelve we must pause to take note that the end God had in view for His ancient people, whether famous or ordinary, was perfection. When He gave calls or uttered commands or made promises, all were issued for this purpose -- that those to whom He spoke should be made perfect. We see then that perfection is by faith -- an aspect of the purpose of faith not usually emphasised, perhaps not even noticed. No one who wishes to fulfil all God's desires and attain to the highest can afford to overlook this, it must not be neglected. The word in James' epistle, 'faith without works is dead ... by works was (is) faith made perfects, is most important. Reviewing the chapter and reading once more of the persons and all that is said about them -- their greatness, their achievements, their endurance, their persecutions and sufferings, and being assured that they all obtained a good report through faith, it is both heartening and sobering to read also that not one of them received the promise. They 'obtained promises', indeed it is said of Abraham that he 'had received the promises', but great as he was (and still is, for he is not dead -- God is not the God of the dead but of the living) Abraham did not receive the promise, neither did anyone else mentioned in the chapter. None of them lived in the age in which God intended to give it, and certainly not in the age He was going to fulfil it. They received the promises relevant to the age into which they were born, and the good report they received is an assurance that in heart by faith they lived in the fulfilment of these promises.

We are now living in the age of the 'better thing'. What they of the former ages had was good; the people were very blessed by what God provided for them, but great as this provision was, it was not as great as that provided for us now; this is a sobering thought. If men and women could be so great under a lesser covenant founded upon lesser promises, how great ought we to be who live in this age of privilege? God has now brought in a new and greater covenant established upon better promises into which we all may enter with Him and live. This is that covenant within which, by God's grace, all may attain unto a perfection denied those Old Testament heroes and heroines. Their lives are testimonies to the fact that, through faith, it is possible to be all that God wants a man to be when he responds to His call under the terms of the covenant he has made and is then in being. We are compassed about with them, the writer says, they are 'a great cloud of witnesses' to this truth. To the best of his ability he has taken good care to ensure that we should never forget them. We are exceedingly indebted to him for this, but more so for the exhortation with which he concludes this section of his epistle. Being a Hebrew himself he, as much as any man, loved to think of the great elders of faith of whom he had written; he had benefitted so much from the knowledge and example of their lives. But just to have done that would have been almost to commit an act of betrayal against his beloved Hebrews, and what is worse against his most beloved Jesus. The writer's intention and commission was not to extol those Old Testament saints above any other, but having pointed to them to: (1) turn the eyes of Christians away from them on to modern saints and from that survey to (2) fix their eyes permanently on Christ.

'We ... are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses' -- he was certain of it; he actually spoke of 'seeing them, they were all around, but he was no mystic. Everywhere he looked he could see them; surely his fellow Hebrews could also see them -- if not they must be closing their eyes. For everyone who

was drawing back and thereby placing himself in danger of perdition there was another who was pressing on to perfection; they were as well aware of that as he. They needed not to look back in history to find traces or testimonies of true men and women of faith, they all knew this kind of person; probably some were living next door to them -- neighbours, friends, loved ones, relatives, they were compassed about with them. By going right back to God and creation and the earliest believers, the writer was establishing the truth that there had always been those who lived by faith, and that the very earliest of them had died in faith because he was righteous. It might have surprised his readers to realise that one out of earth's four earliest inhabitants had done just that and that just before the dreadful flood only one family (one of which was the great hero of his age) out of a whole generation, lived by faith. It was the same with Abraham also, he was the only man of his day and of his family to respond to God and start to live by faith. Those men were alone, yet they did not break under persecution, nor did they retreat under pressure, neither did they draw back and go with their contemporaries to perdition; they lived by faith and overcame all. The tale of history is the tale of the persecution of men and women of faith who in their chosen singularity lived for God. While the epistle was being written history was unfolding in much the same way as it always had.

Many of their contemporaries, the present saints, were being persecuted; all who were living by faith were strangers and pilgrims on the earth; all around them countless numbers were proving daily that faith was the vital factor of life. Faith had not vanished from the earth, only from the hearts of defectors, people such as Judas for instance, and others like him, who either could not or would not be renewed unto repentance -- sons of perdition.

Considerations of people such as these greatly troubled the writer, so did thoughts of those who, like modern Esaus, (whose follies he was intending to record later) would end up weeping over golden opportunities for ever lost, having to live ever after in secondary blessings when they ought to be living in the fullness of God's blessing which goes with the birthright. To people of this sort God's promises mean little or nothing; they ignore His commandments and minimise His provisions, many of them tragically. These people are dangerous stumbling-blocks because by misunderstanding and misinterpreting the promises to themselves they do the same to others. What so many do not seem to understand is that faith is given unto men for many reasons, (not all of them very spectacular such as fathering a nation or building an ark) all of which are to enable them to run the race that is set before them. This is by far the most important thing and it is the reason why those unnamed multitudes of people are included in the roll of the faithful: of these nothing much more is said than, 'these all died in faith', or, 'these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise'. It is very important that men and women commence to live by faith; it is still more important that we continue to live through faith, but it is most important of all to die in faith.

The main thing the writer is trying to make everybody understand is that everyone of whom he has spoken in chapter eleven had run the race set before them and had done so with patience: that is all. Those who had done great things had done them simply because the course they had run had been set by God to embrace those things. Each individual was persuaded in his or her heart that those things were the will and choice of God for him or her, and got on with it whatever it was. None of them made the selection -- whether to make sacrifice, or build something, or start off on pilgrimage, or lead an exodus and cross a sea, or possess a land -- God made the choice and they did it. They took every step as it came and thought no more of it -- they were led, they obeyed, they lived by faith, they ran their race. Those of them who are considered by men to be great were not told they were great before they started, they achieved greatness. But who in the end is able to measure greatness? Who can pronounce greatness as against

insignificance among men? Who? What is greatness but the achievement of God's will, and except he or she runs the race set for each to run who shall achieve that? Hence the great admonition with which the twelfth chapter commences.

Turning from all other witnesses, whether in his day he was either ancient or modern, the writer now directs our gaze to the greatest of all witnesses who have lived on this earth the person of our Lord Jesus Christ. According to His own testimony to John, He is 'the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God'. Before beginning creation, God began with Him. The writer's charge to look off unto Jesus is given to us in context of 'the race', the assumption being that they to whom the epistle is written had already started running. Having brought those Old Testament worthies into view, the writer, as of necessity, now puts them into perspective. They had run their race according to the will of God; not all of them had finished triumphantly though. Dear Noah of the righteous family, who by God's grace had lived and worked so faithfully for so long, dropped out of the race at last it seems. Present runners should not get the impression that they had for ever to be looking backwards. They were witnesses but are not held out as our examples. To run looking backwards would be disastrous, and to run looking around would be equally disastrous. A runner must look forwards not backwards, for he cannot hope to reach the end of the course, leave alone earn the prize, any other way. A glance over the shoulder is sometimes a necessity if the race is a sprint, as in some cases it is, but it must be a quick one. This race is a lifelong one though, a marathon; to look around occasionally therefore is not prejudicial to finishing the race.

So here we have it, a look back at the saints of old, but not too often, and an occasional look around at the present day saints also. Both of these can be helpful, but let it not become habitual lest we are stumbled by them: the instruction is definite, we are to run looking forwards all the time, away from everybody on earth unto Jesus. We may find types of Him in the Old Testament saints, and likenesses of Him in the saints of the New Testament, but these must not fill our eyes and hearts; we are to see Him.

The Greek word rendered 'looking' is more directive than that -- 'looking off' more truly conveys the writer's thought -- 'looking away from, off from, all others -- unto Jesus. If we pause here awhile and ask, 'why should we do this?' the simple answer is 'because He may be seen'. None of those writers of the Old Testament can be seen, neither can any of our contemporaries. 'We see Jesus', said the writer. He is not talking of visions, or of dreams, nor is he speaking of reading about them. Most probably not one of his readers had ever set eyes on a Gospel; this very epistle may have been the only writing of the New Testament canon they had seen in their lives. This sight of which he speaks is heart-sight, and that does not mean imaginary sight, it is real 'sight' -- the only real sight. Having human sight we say, 'we see', when we do not see at all. Moses was as a man who saw the invisible. He ran his race with eye undimmed to the end -- what a good report. No one knows what has happened to all those great ones of former days; beyond some very general statements made about their present whereabouts we know nothing in particular about them and their position in the beyond at this moment. Not so with Jesus though, we know just what happened to Him after He died; we know where He is, where He is seated, what He is doing, what He is saying, both in general and in particular: we know so much about Him. In fact, although we have record of Him so full of details about His earthly life, we know far more of what He did by His death and what he has been doing since His death than all that has been amassed for our reading in the Gospels. Wonderful and necessary as these are, so much of their contents are repetition; it is vital corroboration of course, and absolutely indispensable for us that we should see and know how He ran His race. But all of this was preparation for His death and what lay beyond -- resurrection, ascension,

enthronement, anointing, priesthood, mediation, intercession. Oh how wonderful! We see Jesus crowned with glory and honour, the first great runner to run the race perfectly unto utter perfection. We must look off everybody else unto Him because we may and can and should look unto Him alone.

We see then that to look unto Jesus is the only possible thing to do, for there is no one else to whom to look. Besides this, for many reasons, all of them vital, it is the only sensible thing to do. In the context of what the writer is speaking about, namely faith, Jesus is the obvious one to whom to look, for He is its 'author and finisher'. Why look back to Abraham or Moses in order to see faith in operation when we can look to Jesus and see it in perfection? Why look at elders when we can look to and at the Head? Why look at or hunt for and try to read an edition, whether it be the first or second, when we can read the original Word? Why listen to an interpretation when we can hear and understand the language? Why look at a copy when we can see and have Him of whom every other person, great as he may be, must indeed be only but a flawed copy? Jesus' faith is perfect, it is the faith; Paul said he lived by it, 'I live by the faith of the Son of God'; at the end of his life he said, 'I have finished my course'. Like the writer and most, if not all, of that first generation of New Testament saints, let us lay aside every weight and the sin which so easily besets us and run with patience the race set before us, looking unto Jesus the whole time.

Pressing the point still further, the writer says, 'Consider him': to consider is to dwell upon with fixity of purpose; a glance will not do for this. A glance may serve to attract our attention, but being attracted we must then become attentive; heart and mind must settle upon Him and stay set for ever. Doing so we will discover what now is being told us, namely that viewed without faith the prize Jesus was heading for did not appear to be worth having -- He ended up on a cross. Was that the reward of the life of faith? Yes. Jesus is the only one of whom it could be written, He was born by faith and He died by faith -- both His birth and His death (as well as His life) were accomplished by acts of faith on His part; He chose and then willed to be born and He chose and then willed to die. Others died in faith, He died by faith; it is to this we owe our salvation. Everything of Jesus was 'by faith'; by His humanity He proved that He is its author and its finisher, because in His humanity He lived out faith effortlessly before all men. Thereby He showed that He was perfect and it is to this perfection that we are called.

In His sufferings our great Exemplar endured far greater things than any before Him, and it was therein that His faith was most greatly displayed, for it is by persecution and suffering that faith most speedily develops and is enhanced. It is outstandingly noticeable that the Lord Jesus nowhere claims that any of the works He did on earth were accomplished by faith. He gave teachings and instructions about faith; He sometimes commented about other individuals' faith or lack of it; here and there He complimented some for their faith, but never spoke about His own. He could quite easily have done, and we might properly think that He ought to have done so, but He did not think so, for if He had thought so He would have done it. Apparently to Him it would not have been proper to do that, for by so doing He would have been drawing attention to faith works instead of to the faith life. Thereby He would have blurred the real issue; the purpose for His coming was not to do miracles, but to give His life. Although He did perform wonderful works, it was because He was such a wonderful person, but He also did carpentry for the same reason. Our glorious Lord is our life, and, as the writer says at the beginning of this section, 'the just shall live by faith'.

One of the most remarkable things to emerge from this great section on faith is the amazing way in which New Testament truth is revealed in the Old Testament. Surveying once more the opening verses of chapter eleven, it is possible to trace an outline of some things basic to salvation in every age, things which are fulfilled in the New Testament by Christ and more particularly expounded by its authors. This is

probably the reason why the writer commences on the note of understanding -- 'Through faith we understand'. The fundamental power which enables us to understand the things of God is faith; it enables us to grasp facts in relationship to eternal truth and, by other vital graces, build them together into sure knowledge, verifiable by every spiritual man. However, God is not only concerned to inform us of this means of understanding, He is keen also to instruct us as to what He wants us to understand, namely 'that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear'.

The apparent things are the result of non-apparent things, and in most cases are of far less importance. In some instances they are of equal importance, and in others the non-apparent both precedes the apparent and also issues from it: this is always so in every case involving spiritual and moral factors. This is easily demonstrable with reference to the death of our Lord Jesus on the cross. The cross and He who hung on it, as well as His suffering and the blood He shed there, were apparent to all, but that which was not apparent, namely the love (to name but one of the spiritual graces manifest there) which both preceded it and issues from and through it, is of far greater importance than the event itself. The fact and the enactment of the cross was, and still is, indispensable for redemption and our salvation, but without the love and grace and mercy and righteousness, and all the other virtues in God's heart which preceded and engineered it, all would have been as valueless as the wood and the thorns and the nails employed by man to bring it about, apparent as they were.

Following these words about the substance (may we say reality? For without substance nothing is real) and the understanding of faith, the world's first and righteous sacrifice is introduced and the death of him that offered it. No attention is paid to creation at all; the purpose of the writer is to draw attention to invisible things, not to that which is visible. He makes as few references as possible to that which is material; in every case the un-apparent is more important than the apparent. From that sacrifice and death the writer passes on to draw our attention to the translation of a man in order that he should not see death, the reason for the miracle being that he pleased God. Then, before mentioning the next great wonder, we are informed that, when seeking God, we must come to Him in true faith and with diligence, believing that if we do so we shall be amply rewarded; and so our attention is drawn to Noah and his great work. Of all that this man accomplished, the one thing emphasised is this: he 'prepared an ark for the saving of his house', and so three major historic factors foreshadowing the person and work of Christ lie before our eyes: (1) His sacrifice, offering and death; (2) His ascension (assuming His resurrection) -- He will not see death again; (3) His preparation of the ark of salvation for His family. It is but the barest of outlines, but it touches upon the three most vital points of the gospel which open up doors of access to information for every enquiring soul. Perhaps we may safely call it 'The Antediluvian Gospel'.

The reward of faith to every diligent seeker who comes to God upon the basis of the offering and death of Christ is inclusion into His house of salvation. Speaking of the ark, Peter says, 'wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved'. So it was that the righteous family abode in safety, thankfulness and joy, while the cries of the doomed died away, drowned in the relentless downpour from above and the unstoppable upsurgings from beneath. It seems that creation itself rebelled against the wickedness of men and women, heaven and earth joining with God to mete out judgement. With that flood of judgement God ended an age, and with its passing commenced another.

From these three episodes, which together present a picture of the work and experiences of the Son, our attention is turned to that one great man of scripture who represents to us the person of the Father -- Abraham. This is a logical unfolding of truth which links the foregoing with all the rest and sets the whole in perspective. The emphasis so far has been upon the person and work of the son, now it is to be upon the

person and work of the father. When he approaches the climax of the story of Moriah Moses uses a crucial phrase, 'so they went, both of them together', carrying all the necessities for the death of the son; the sacrifice was to be carried out by common consent -- in unison. The house is the son's, He prepared it, but the family is the Father's; He begets them.

It is in this spirit that the writer exhorts us to look away from all the worthies of chapter eleven, and lift our eyes unto Jesus. He is the author and the finisher of our faith. He perfected faith in the flesh and perfected it in the Spirit also. As He was the end of the law for righteousness, so He was the end of faith for righteousness; He has fulfilled everything. He was the seed of Abraham, the seed of David, the seed of the woman and the seed of God; He was the seed of faith. Receiving Him from the dead, His Father received us in a figure also; let us then, as those who are alive from the dead, run this race with patience; it is set before us, we may move from it but we cannot move it. In the day when rewards are given, we must receive the good report. Meanwhile let us

also be among the number of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises and enter into our inheritance on earth. We must live by faith and not draw back to perdition; rather let us go on to perfection, ready to make the offering, build an ark, plunge the knife, or, in God's will, be translated out and away from it all. Our sole aim must be to please Him and if without faith that is impossible, then let this so great faith be the substance of our lives, our very nature that effortlessly we shall believe, obey and endure to the end.

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