

# In Faith, Jesus

October 31, 2010; All Saints Day  
Hebrews 11: 32 – 12: 2

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This month we have been digging deep into Hebrews 11 today ending with the heavenly image of chapter 12. The phrase, by faith, stands at the center of it all. By faith, Rahab; by faith, we see God; by faith, still seeking the promised land; and today by faith, Jesus. What has underscored this series is faith being a willingness to trust God, above all else, with our lives as Jesus did.

“...Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God.”

In this sentence there is a little Greek preposition about which scholars have spilled much ink. Whenever there is much written there is usually a precept of Christianity at stake. The preposition is “anti” which here is translated as “for the sake of”—“for the sake of the joy that was set before him [Jesus] endured the cross.” You who enjoy etymology may rightly ask doesn’t anti mean against. Yes, it can. That’s why it is the center of the debate. Some have been led to argue that Jesus had to choose against joy in this life, bear the cross, to gain the throne in heaven.

Yet others argue, Dean Attridge included (my teacher of Hebrews thanks to a rich commentary he has written for the series *Hermeneutica*), that such a translation goes against the feeling of this scripture which isn’t meant to talk about the heaviness of the Christian life, challenge yes, joyless existence, no way.

While there are times when we take on responsibility as Christians that we may not otherwise take on, while there are times when life is difficult, the Christian life is not one long walk with the cross on our back up the hill of Golgotha. In fact, the idea it is, may be one of the sins that clings to us too tightly.

Look, the other image that begins chapter 12 is of running a race. Think of it. When you are racing there is nothing in your hands, nothing heavy on your back. Your body is free to move. It is fun to run a race. That moment you line up at the starting line, you have hope, an image of breaking the tape, or simply crossing the finishing line. When you begin the other runners spur you on to go faster than you ever would on your own. Your heart pumps, your body moves in time, you breathe, you are alive!

Some of you have asked me in casual conversation how I am. You have had to endure my telling you about my plantar faciitis that prevents me from running or jumping

for a time. Those things children do to express joy, I can’t do right now. It drives me crazy. I watch Rachel run and jump over a puddle with envy. I have to put it in perspective. Some years back there was an audio essay spoken on the radio by a woman who had been confined to her wheelchair: “What I miss most,” she said, “is running, stretching out my legs, with the air blowing through my hair, ” We, who talk about “working out,” burning fat, doing what is necessary to get healthy can get lost in the pain and trouble of it all and forget that running is an image of embodied joy.

And I think that is true of the Christian life as well. We get so bogged down in bearing our cross that we forget that the Christian life is a joyful life.

The image of Jesus bearing the cross, walking up the hill of Golgotha, with all standing against him too often becomes our excuse for remaining in a destructive relationship or having none at all. It all too often becomes a blinder to what is good...I’m not meant to be happy or there can be no happiness in this world. Instead of the cross being part of our lives, it becomes our life.

Jesus didn’t live his life on Golgotha or for the sake of Golgotha and neither should we.

So “anti” not against joy but for the sake of the joy that was set before him, Jesus endured the cross.

Our text provides only a few words about the joy that was set before Jesus, saying, now he has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God.

A throne suggests a kingdom, a palace, a ruler. That it is God’s kingdom suggests we aren’t on planet earth anymore. It is an image of God being king that gets Jesus through. God is the one who rules all so he can trust God with his life.

But it is more than a vision of God as king, it is a vision that reveals Jesus’ place with God that propels him forward in faith.

It reminds me of a child who maneuvers her way to be right next to the teacher; CS Lewis’ vision of the children of Narnia rolling in the grass with Aslan; a grand dinner where the host, one who has made a difference in your life, asks you to sit next to her.

God is the one Jesus most wants to be with. A son will do the most extraordinary things if he knows he is pleasing to his Dad. By faith, Jesus. Jesus with God, Jesus sitting

next to God's throne, it is a glimpse of heaven.

Once upon a time there was a couple who loved nothing better in life than a good game of golf. In their working years, they played the game every chance they got, and on the eve of their retirement, they looked forward to many happy hours hitting that little white ball all over the links.

Yet, just as this couple was on the verge of realizing their lifelong dream, tragedy struck. The two were in a terrible car accident on the way to their favorite course. They died instantly.

There was no pain. They had the sensation of traveling together through a long tunnel of light, and when they emerged they found themselves — where else? — on a golf course. And what a course! It was more beautiful than any golf course in the land of the living.

The man looked off to his side, and there he saw a gleaming white golf cart, with two sets of clubs in the back. He picked out a driver from the bag labeled "His," set a ball on the tee and swung for all he was worth. A hole in one! The man was ecstatic. Never had he come close to such an experience on earth.

Then his wife stepped up to the tee. Bang! A hole in one. And that's the way it went for both of them, as they progressed from hole to hole. When they reached the end of the course, their scores were tied at 18.

These two couldn't believe their good fortune. They smiled at one another as if to say, "Isn't this wonderful?"

Just then, they glanced at the sand trap next to the 18th hole. There they saw an old man slowly raking the sand — the groundskeeper, no doubt.

The husband caught the man's eye and called out with a grin, "I never dreamed heaven could be so beautiful!"

Said the groundskeeper, "I hate to disappoint you folks, but this isn't heaven." Oh, hell, it was too good of a story not to tell.

I think the point is this...we get so caught up in creating lives that are perfect, we imagine heaven must be our idea of perfection and forget all about God.

Jesus found heaven because he sought to trust and to please God, his father, his king.

I found some words written by Philips Brooks in a sermon called "The Candle of the Lord." Philips Brooks was the Episcopal Bishop of Massachusetts in the 1890s and his words seem, to me, a fitting description of Jesus' faith. Faith is "obedience, not hard and forced, but ready, loving and spontaneous; the obedience of the child to the father...; [faith is] the doing of duty not merely that the duty may be done, but that the soul in doing it may

become capable of receiving and uttering God; [faith is] the bearing of pain not merely because the pain must be borne, but that the bearing of it may make the soul able to burn with the divine fire which found it in the furnace."

There are many, like Philips Brooks, who have followed Jesus, who have shown the way. There are those who have gone before us whose names we called out in the first half of worship. And, then there are those who are with us still, guides, mentors, people who remind us that God is real, God is active, God cares, God rules. In your hands is a leaf for our wreath...on that leaf write the name or names of those who now come by your side, to encourage you to keep the finish line in sight, that vision that you belong with God [Pause].

Jesus is the source of the faith of all who run this race towards God in heaven. Jesus tells us, it doesn't matter that we aren't perfect. He didn't come to make us perfect. He came to take away our sin, that we may shed its weight and run with the lightness of more faith, of more trust in God, that we may run with joy...oh, how our cups overflow!

### Hebrews 11:32 - 12:2

And what more should I say? For time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets— who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions, quenched raging fire, escaped the edge of the sword, won strength out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight. Women received their dead by resurrection. Others were tortured, refusing to accept release, in order to obtain a better resurrection. Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. They were stoned to death, they were sawn in two, they were killed by the sword; they went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, persecuted, tormented— of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, and in caves and holes in the ground. Yet all these, though they were commended for their faith, did not receive what was promised, since God had provided something better so that they would not, without us, be made perfect.

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God.