

When You are Weighed Down

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Our scripture reading in this afternoon hour comes from the book of Hebrews, Hebrews 12 starting at the first verse and reading till verse 13. Hebrews 12, verse 1,

1 Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, 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 is set down at the right hand of the throne of God. 3 For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds. 4 Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin. 5 And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children, My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him: 6 For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. 7 If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not? 8 But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons. 9 Furthermore we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live? 10 For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure; but he for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness. 11 Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby. 12 Wherefore lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees; 13 And make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way; but let it rather be healed.

Thus far the reading of God's infallible word.

Dear congregation, a word of encouragement. When someone speaks a word of encouragement to you and you find yourself greatly discouraged, burdened, heavy laden, what a difference that can make. The whole letter to the Hebrews was a word of encouragement, or as you can read in Hebrews 13 verse 22, a word of exhortation.

Encouragement literally is en-courage-ment and literally it means when courage comes into your soul, en-courage-ment.

How needful that is for Christians, true Christians as they go through life's journey in which there can be so many discouragements all around as well as within. The Hebrews had faced many discouragements. You can read in chapter 10 how they had endured a great fight of afflictions and in the midst of that they were made a gazingstock both of reproaches and afflictions. We know from history that these people were under severe persecution and they could, and many of them did, suffer the spoiling of their goods. Authorities would knock on their doors and tell them, "If you deny Christ as God, then you may keep all that you have, but if you will not, then everything that is yours becomes the state's and others will take it over." And that, congregation, is still happening today with many of the Lord's people around this world.

The Hebrews had endured one wave of affliction and by God's grace they had weathered that storm, but they were about to suffer another wave, a second wave, and many of them were growing discouraged and some were even contemplating going back to Judaism in which they were relatively safer, where they could have their synagogue-ship, where they could go on pilgrimage to Jerusalem and see the high priest and see the ordinances, and well, as a Christian, was there something other than persecution and affliction? But into the midst of this situation comes the apostle and he comes with a word of encouragement, "lift up the hands which hang down, and confirm the feeble knees; and make a straight path for your feet." And this is a word which we do well to hear too at the beginning of this year, and perhaps over the threshold of this new year you have carried burdens, the new year has not shaken them from off your back. In fact, they feel perhaps heavier than ever. Well, listen to what the Lord says to us in the words of this text, which can be found in Hebrews chapter 12 and verse 1 and 2, these familiar words, "Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, 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 is set down at the right hand of the throne of God."

Thus far the words of our text. The theme looking to the Lord this afternoon is, "When You are Weighed Down." When you are weighed down. We'll see, first of all, what to lay aside; secondly, where to look; and thirdly, how to run. When you are weighed down: what to lay aside; where to look; and how to run.

Well, congregation, the author to the Hebrews is using a picture from athletic life, something that we all know about to some extent, especially you young people, a race. And the word actually in the Greek is *agon* and I'm not here to teach you Greek, but you can remember this word *agon*, why? Because we have our word *agony* from that. So it's *agony* without the *y*, *agon*. And this race is something that costs *agon* as you prepare for it, *agon* when you go through it, and in most cases when you ran a race, and still today, there will be *agony* afterwards as you deal with the consequences of running rigorously, fighting, struggling, enduring. And congregation, the race is a picture that is used more

often in the scriptures for the Christian life. The Christian life, despite what many people think, today is not some midsummer picnic or some stroll through a meadow. The Christian life is a fight. It is a warfare. It is an agony. It is a striving, a struggling.

They used to welcome newly professing Christians with the words, "Welcome to the strife," and indeed, the Christian life is a battle. There are a thousand pressures that come upon the Christian from every angle, from every corner. Satan, of course, is no friend of the Christian. You know that. The world is constantly scoffing or tempting and your own sinful heart, people of God, is wayward, backsliding, bent on backsliding, distracting, discouraging full and fomenting unbelief, pride and every sin, and this the author knows and he deals with this, first of all, in his exhortation here in Hebrews 12 verse 1 and 2 and he says here, "laying aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us." There's two things there; we need to look at them separately. The first is laying aside every weight. Now children, you can relate to this. You've never seen, I trust, running a race laden down with suitcases, bags, long and heavy coats, and things like that. That would be foolish, wouldn't it? When you run a race, you get rid of whatever impediments there may be as much as you can and so it is too in the Christian life. You see, the author to the Hebrews here is not speaking in the first place of necessarily sinful things. We'll get to that in a moment. He speaks here in terms of weight, that means things that weigh you down, that bog you down, things that distract you, things that may not of themselves be wrong, but when you really occupy yourself with them, invest yourself in them, accumulate a lot of these things, they will weigh you down.

J. C. Ryle said that the Christian has much trouble with this world, in getting ahead in this world. There's trouble in getting things, there's trouble in keeping things, and there's trouble in losing things, he said. There's trouble in everything that the Christian has to do with this world and yet, why do so many of us get laden down with all sorts of legitimate things? We should be asking ourselves this question, "Is this, is that going to help me to run the race set before me?"

Now, obviously, the Lord has given us many good things to enjoy and we ought to be thankful for them when they come out of his hands, and it would be wrong not to be thankful for legitimate things like marriage and family and possessions and food and drink and raiment and things like that, and yet you can be so occupied with these good things, with these legitimate things that they really, in the end of the day, they take all your affection, they take all your occupation and you have to give account of that. There are times when the Lord takes these things back, these good things which he has given to you. Are we able like Job to say, "The Lord has given, the Lord has taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord." It's not such an easy thing, but may the Lord give faith to do exactly that.

Just before this chapter, we read of the heroes of faith in chapter 11. When you read their names, whether it be Abram or Sarah or Moses or Rahab, whatever it may be, all of them had to lay aside many weights, many legitimate things in order that they would not be bogged down and so it is in the life of every child of God. Ask yourself that question at the beginning of this year, "What is it that has been weighing me down, that has an

illegitimately heavy place in my life? How may I, by the Spirit and by grace, lay this down?"

But secondly, and more to the point, the author goes on to speak not just about every weight, but about the sin which doth so easily beset us, and literally the word is there that the sin which so easily entangles itself around us and that's what sin does. It entangles us. Sin is never neutral. Sin is never this thing that, oh, we sin and then there's no consequences. No, it entangles itself around our heart, around our mind, around our bodies, around our relationships. It's just an all-entangling thing. And to run with sin, entangling you? Well, clearly the message is be rid of it. Just like a runner would not take long garments that would entangle themselves all around his legs or his arms, whatever it is, the author to the Hebrews says, lay it aside, let it go.

Now what is the sin that doth so easily beset you? Some have taken this to be bosom sins, besetting sins, sins that each one has a propensity, almost a gravitational, tempting pull towards. And that may be different for different people. For some, the fear of man is a great snare, to be doing what you're doing because you want the smiles of people around you or you want to avoid their frowns, whatever they may be. Other people are driven by greed. They wake up in the morning and the first thought is of how to increase their portfolio, how to make money, and it doesn't just last during the day, but they're awake at night with it and even in church they sit and they think about the next thing that they can do to increase their bank accounts. Or power, many love power, power over other people and they do what they can to exert that power. Others are lazy and it's a besetting sin for them simply to indulge themselves. Or worrying, over-anxiety, anxiety over all sorts of things from morning, noon and night. The Bible pictures someone who in the morning says, "Oh, were to God it were evening," and in the evening, he or she says, "Would to God it were morning." It's just your day is so consumed with anxiety. Bitterness. Jealousy. So many things can be besetting and bosom sins and if this is true and we examine ourselves and we're honest with ourselves and we don't just simply push this away, but when we face it honestly, oh, for that cry in our hearts that the Lord would rid us of this sin and that we ourselves would put the sword through this sin. And maybe it involves being accountable to someone who is older than you, more experienced than you, someone who can help you, praying also for you, but especially on your knees before the Lord, confessing your sins and forsaking your sins. That's what the scripture calls for, looking unto the Lord Jesus.

And though all these things are true, I think what the author to the Hebrews means is something slightly different because he says here, "the sin which doth so easily beset us," meaning that there is a sin, a particular sin that worms its way into all of our hearts, whoever we are, and when we compare scripture with scripture, and especially when we read the whole letter to the Hebrews, it seems that it is particularly the sin of unbelief, the sin of unbelief, which indeed so easily besets every one of us, converted and unconverted alike. Someone has said this: distrust of God is the great hindrance in our heavenly race, the weight that obstructs our powers, the cloud which fills us with gloom. Nothing injures us more, nothing dishonors him more than unbelief.

It is true congregation that at the root of all sin there is the not believing God. At the root of all sin God in our mind is insufficient. Whether it is lust or greed or pride or whatever, we have this innate sense that God is insufficient and so we need something else, we need to do something else and we don't trust the Lord and his word. That's why Satan also sought to tempt the Lord Jesus in the wilderness, "Turn these stones into bread." And this was an attack at the Lord Jesus in the sense of would he trust his heavenly Father to take care of him or would he distrust his Father and make for his own provisions in those moments? We see how the Lord Jesus Christ fought Satan and said, "Thou shall not live by bread alone but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God shall a man live," in other words, to take God at his word, to feast on God's word. Also in this new year, may the Lord give this.

And so, congregation, if we are weighed down, it may be in the battle of life, it may be in the afflictions that come upon our soul. Let us at least examine this: what is it that weighs us, that weighs down our soul in terms of our own responsibility, in terms of what the Lord is speaking to us here in his word? What are these weights? What are these sins? You know, two people may be undergoing the exact same affliction, exactly the same, and yet the one person is so brought down by it, so weighed down by that affliction, whereas the other person, by that same affliction, is lifted up into the heavenlies almost. Think of Stephen. He had stones being thrown at him. Achan, Achan had stones being thrown at him, and down he went, all because of his sin. But Stephen had stones thrown at him, and the man was lifted up into the heavenlies. What weighed him down? By God's grace, he was able to see beyond himself and the Lord drew back the veil and made him to see his Christ, his Savior. Do you see the difference?

A lot of times we think that in order for us to have this sense of freedom, that we need to be rid of afflictions, that we need to be rid of these burdens that come upon us that we can't control when the scriptures tell us otherwise, it pinpoints these weights and these sins as being the real problem in terms of this feeling weighed down. Well, that then, congregation, first of all, laying aside every weight but secondly, congregation, and really more to the point, because if what I had said thus far, if that were it, then you would simply be cast back on yourself and that's never what we wish, as true as all that I've said is, but we need to keep the negative together with the positive, and that is what the author to the Hebrews rushes to turn to, because listen to it with the words of our text, "Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith." What a glorious phrase that is, "Looking unto Jesus." If you're looking for a book to read this new year, it's good to read good books, how about "Looking Unto Jesus" by Isaac Ambrose? Hundreds of pages, all of which, each of which direct you to look to him whom to know is life eternal.

Looking unto Jesus and you know, congregation, it actually says in the original, and this is precious, "Looking away unto Jesus. Looking away unto Jesus." In other words, here we are, all these weights, all these burdens, all these sins, all these hindrances, and the race even, the race so wearisome, so hard, the author says, "Look away. Look away.

Don't look at these things. Don't even look at the cloud of witnesses because as helpful in a way as they can be, they can't ultimately help us."

By the "cloud of witnesses," of course, he means the heroes of faith, those who have gone before. He lists many of them personally, even in the 11th chapter, and he goes on to speak of the many in addition to them. Witnesses, martyrs, people who have run the race before us throughout the generations, maybe even some of your forebears, your father, your mother, your friends, some of them now in glory. They ran that race. They are witnesses, so to speak, who can testify of the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ where indeed, that can be an encouragement. And we often think of them and the words that they've spoken to us when they were true children of the Lord, and examples even and we follow them insofar as they follow the Lord. And yet in the end of the day, is it to them that we look? Is that enough for you to look to them, feeble and frail? In and of themselves, no, they would all point you to another. They would point you to the Lord Jesus Christ and that is exactly what our text says, "Looking away unto Jesus." That means don't fixate on this world. Don't fixate on your burdens. Don't be so occupied with your afflictions that you don't see anything else and that you can't talk about anything else. But look away unto Jesus, the author and finisher of the faith. As Paul says in Philippians 3, "forgetting the things that are behind, forgetting them and reaching forward to the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." And again, the word in the Greek here means fastening our eyes not on things, not on people, but on the Lord continually, constantly, without let up, looking continually and constantly to the Lord Jesus Christ, who is the author and the finisher of the faith.

And notice this precious word that is used here for the Lord Jesus, "Looking unto Jesus," his personal name. The author to the Hebrews is fond of that personal name, he uses it more often, but there's such a familiarity about that while not losing any of the majesty of that name. He is the Lord seated on the right hand of the majesty on high, and yet people of God, his name is Jesus, for he shall save his people from their sins. He hasn't left that name behind. He hasn't exchanged that name for another name. Indeed, the Father gives him a name above every other name, but at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow. He retains that name Jesus. He is still the Savior. Call him Jesus.

So close. So precious. So approachable. There is none like Jesus. And there is nothing like looking unto Jesus. Do you look to him? Do you look away to him? You know, that can happen in your life that you're focused on yourself, you're focused on people, you're focused on your tribulations, on your trials, but you don't find any salvation there. You don't find anything encouraging there. You don't find any hope there. And then the Lord calls you in his word and he calls you like he did Mary in the garden bowed down, heavy laden, so confused, so in darkness, so doubting, and he simply calls your name, "Mary," and you look away to him and everything is different. No, nothing changes but you see it all differently because you're looking away to Jesus.

And you know, congregation, he's the author and he's the finisher and that is the end of all dispute because so often what weighs us down most of all is, "Will I make it? Will I succeed? Will I reach the other side? Will I endure?" Looking unto Jesus, the author and

the finisher. Thanks be to God, this is his name. Imagine his name was only author and you were to be the perfecter. Imagine he would only be the alpha and not the omega. Imagine he would only be the beginning. That's what a lot of people believe, "You know, the Lord does his part and you have to do the rest." I could never be saved with a God or Savior like that. I need an author. I need a finisher. And he it is who begins the work and continues it until the day of his return. The Lord forsakes not the work of his own hands. What he has begun, he will finish

And the author to the Hebrews doesn't just stay with his name, but it tells us about his own race, "who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is now set down at the right hand of the throne of God." In other words, congregation, in the gospel, we see him, don't we? On the ground is a worm and no man. In the garden, with the cup of the wrath of God pressed against his lips, groveling, saying in the words of the psalmist, "I am a worm and no man, despised of the people," and not just of the people, but bearing the wrath of God, his Father, from all eternity, in whose bosom he was, bearing his wrath, forsaken, taking the curse that you, people of God, deserved, and becoming that even. He was made a curse. Imagine that. He who did no wrong, neither was guile or deceit found in his mouth, he was made a curse for sinners, sinners of Adam's race, sinners like you, sinners like me.

And he did it so willingly, so willingly, out of love. Is there anyone else imaginable to whom you would look? Isn't he, people of God, the fairest of 10,000, the lily of the valley, the bright and morning star? He endured the cross, not just that wooden beam that was placed upon his shoulder, but having been nailed to the cross, he endured the full of it for all the people of God in every age, sinners all of them, the worst of sinners, people who never asked for him, people who never sought him, people who never wanted him. "We will not have this man to rule over us." And yet he did it so willingly, submissive to his Father's good pleasure, aye, for thee, lest thou should have perished everlastingly. He bore the reproach of hell, of death, of torments, an eternity of them all for sinners. As one has said, he drank the cup of damnation and he did it out of love.

The author and the finisher who endured the cross, despising the shame. Oh, what shame there was to the cross while he hung there between heaven and earth and people who passed by, they railed against him. They mocked him. There he was. Mothers probably turned the faces of their children away from that man, "Don't look at that man. See what happens to bad men like him." The thieves on the cross next to him, they scoffed at him. Imagine that. They were dying. They were moments away from eternity, but they did what you would do, what I would do by nature. They didn't herald Christ. They didn't even pray to Christ. Not of themselves, no. They railed on him. They gnashed their teeth against him. They said to him, "Save us! Save us, if you will!" But they said it scoffingly, mockingly. They took his own words, the people who passed by, they said, "Others he saved, but himself he cannot save. He trusted in God that he should deliver him. Let him deliver him if he delights in him." Those words were arrows into his pure soul, his Father, his God, but he endured it and all the while he despised the shame. He bore the shame and he looked at the shame that he endured for sinners, for people like you, people like me, he looked at that shame and all for the joy set before him, he despised the shame. He

said, "Shame, be gone. I will bear. I will bear the shame all for my people. It is worth it. I will do it."

Despising the shame all for the joy set before him. What was that joy? The joy was, of course, the Father's good pleasure, seeing his Father, fulfilling the commission of his Father, being welcomed into heaven, the place where his Father dwelleth. On the day of his ascension, when the gates lifted their heads, the glad summons obeyed, and the King of glory entered in to the acclaim of all in heaven, the angels, the archangels, to the great demise and horror of devils, but to the great acclaim of angels there he entered within the throne room of God for the joy set before him. But not just that, for the joy that was set before him in this sense of you, and you, and you, and you, and me, coming to the knowledge of him as Savior, confessing our sins, forsaking our sins, and cleaving unto him. Does that give him joy, you say? Yes. There's joy in heaven over one sinner that repents. There's joy in heaven when one prodigal comes to his senses and says, "I've sinned against heaven and before thy sight." And you see, that's all the fruit of Christ's work on the cross. He shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days and the pleasure of the most high shall prosper in his hand. He shall see of the travail of his soul and he shall be satisfied.

That's his joy, friends. When by grace you repent, when you come to conversion, when you fall on your knees, when all that you are, body, soul, is no longer your own, but belongs unto him, and you give yourself away, no longer to this world, no longer to sin, but to Christ, "Thine we are, O son of David. Take me, let me be consecrated, Lord, to thee." To thee, that's joy. That's joy among the angels. That's joy in the presence of the Father. That's joy in the heart of Christ. The Lord Jesus says it, he says, "Keep them by thine own word. And my joy," he says, "I give unto you, not as the world gives." The world gives some joy, but takes it away. The only joy the world can give perishes with the using but the joy that Christ can give a sinner in the knowledge of himself, the world cannot take away. Even afflictions, though afflictions can cloud them, though afflictions can also brighten them as you look away to Jesus, but that joy that Jesus gives in the heart of a sinner as that sinner comes to see everything in Jesus, the world can't take that away. No man taketh your joy away.

Well, there's one more thing that is the joy set before the Lord Jesus Christ. It's an amazing thing. But when you, child of God, when you breathe your last here on the earth, the people around you are grieving, mourning your loss, but heaven's rejoicing. The sinner saved comes through the pearly gates and what words will you hear, child of God? "Enter thou into the joy of the Lord." Not your own joy. You haven't procured this. You haven't made this. You never could. But it's the joy that the Lord Jesus Christ has purchased, reverently speaking, he has purchased and he inducts his people into that joy when all sorrow and sighing forever shall flee away. It's amazing, isn't it? Here the people of God sigh and groan and mourn a lot. There's a day, child of God, that day is coming sooner every day, when you'll bid farewell one last time to sorrow and sighing and you'll be forever in the joy of the Lord. However long sorrow has been your companion, that day you won't enter within those gates because that eternal city has walls, walls of salvation and gates of salvation and sorrow and sighing cannot enter there. It will be

everlasting joy in the presence of him who loved you, child of God, bought you, child of God, upheld you, and brought you all the way to Zion with songs, with everlasting joy upon your heads. Oh, isn't this it, people of God, to reflect more on that joy, that heavenly joy, on that wellspring of joy? At thy right hand are pleasures forevermore. "When I in righteousness at last thy glorious face shall see, when all the weary night is past, and I awake with thee to view the glories that abide, then, then I shall be satisfied."

But a word to you my unconverted friend, because as much as I wish and I would to God that you would partake of those joys and you still can, but friend, if you remain as you are, you'll be in that place where joy will forever be walled out. Never will any atom of joy ever enter into that place where you will be, may God forbid it, with their groans and sorrow and misery and torments without ending, in the place where the worm dies not, the conscience, accusing all the time of all the opportunities, all the overtures of mercy, all the beckonings, "Oh my people, hear my pleadings. If thou wouldst but hearken now." All these things will come back to you and no joy ever, forever, forever, but simply torments upon torments. It's unimaginable, but it's true. What need you have, my unconverted friend, to fall in this very moment without any delay upon the arms of mercy, stretched out in the gospel for sinners, whoever you are, however much you've sinned, however deep your guilt, crimson, scarlet, however bad your record and however miserable and evil your heart, this man receiveth sinners. He will abundantly pardon for his thoughts are not as our thoughts.

Oh, to look away unto him. Maybe there's a soul here who's never looked to Jesus. You've heard about Jesus. You've thought about Jesus. You've read about Jesus. But you've never looked to him. You've never seen him. Some of you may say, "I wonder if I've seen him. I would to God that I could see him with eyes of faith. I wonder if I have? I fear I haven't," perhaps you say. My friend, are you like Christian in Pilgrim's Progress? Do you see yonder light there gleaming ever so little, a sliver perhaps as you focus, as you look out? And Christian said to Evangelist, "I think I'm beginning to see it." Look away to Jesus. Look away from your own self-righteousness. Look away from your sin. Look away from people. Look away from frowns and smiles of people. Look away unto Jesus. He's everything. He's everything. He's the bridegroom of the neediest soul. He has everything that you could ever long for and need to live your life and to die with liberty and freedom and enter into heaven at last. But don't come short of looking away to Jesus.

And then you will also run the race, as we see in conclusion, and that just briefly because, congregation, the author to the Hebrews as he speaks this word of encouragement and puts courage within the souls of his hearers, he says to them, "run with patience." And the word for patience is really the word for endurance, meaning sure, we need patience. Oh, we need a lot more patience than we think we need. Sometimes when we're young, we think we can be pretty patient, but as you get into life and as you get into afflictions and as you get into the people around you, oh, how you need patience. You have need of patience, the Bible says. Pray patience, the fruit of the Spirit. But actually the word here is perseverance or endurance, meaning don't give up, don't slow down. You need to run with endurance, not just for a time, not just for a period of time, but keep on keeping on, running, running, running until you're there with him at the end.

In ancient times when they had Olympic races, they would hang a wreath at the very end, and it was to inspire the runners because they could catch a glimpse of that wreath and they thought and they knew that if they could reach that end, then they would obtain the prize. And in the midst of the agony of the race, of this agony, this agony, that could inspire them but, congregation, for the believer it's not some reward or some prize at the end that inspires me at least, and I don't think any of the people of God here. But you know, Christ is everything. He's at the end. He's the author and the finisher, and he's there enabling you, dear believer, as you look away to him, as you focus on him, as you run with endurance facing and focused on him. He is your joy. He is everything that your soul could ever long for and need, even in the midst of great trials and tribulations and afflictions, and even death itself.

You see, congregation, isn't it like this, just think of this one moment here as we close together. A lot of times we think of these afflictions and burdens that we experience in life as things that weigh us down and that keep us looking down and trip us up, but if we see things the way the Holy Spirit tells it to us in this text, these afflictions, which are but for a moment, they are so much wind, as it were, to drive us faster, faster to the finish line but it's our sins that weigh us down. It's our entanglements that weigh us down. It's our preoccupations with this world that weigh us down. And the afflictions are all so many wind in the sails, the Triune God drawing his people home and readying them to run more quickly towards the end.

Isn't this what Paul says in Romans 5 when he says, "tribulation worketh patience and patience experience, and experience hope, and hope maketh not ashamed because the love of God is poured out in our hearts." Will you think of that the next time this year, perhaps even this very moment, that tribulation and trials and suffering and burdens come upon your path? What are the real burdens? It's sin. It's the world. When you may be looking away unto Jesus, then afflictions will just drive you more readily, more quickly into the harbor, into the haven of rest where Christ is. Oh, may the Lord give many, could it be all of us, to lay aside every weight and the sin that doth so easily beset us, and to run with patience, endurance, the race that is set before us, looking away unto Jesus. May the Lord give us that this year, for as long as life shall last, and all by his grace, and all for his glory. Amen.