

## Words of Encouragement: The Joy Set Before Him

Hebrews 12:2—What a compelling verse: “Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.”

First, that anyone would face execution and consider it a thing to be ‘endured’ is defies comprehension. In fact, Jesus not only endured the cross, he determinedly gave himself to that end. Peter soon realized this when he suggested that his Lord ought not to die in such a way. His statement prompted one of the stiffest rebukes in all of scripture: “Get behind me Satan.” (Mk 8:33) Jesus’ attitude toward the cross is even more unfathomable when we consider that the cross is the place where for all time Jesus would bear the full force of God’s wrath against sin. 2 Corinthians 5:21 tells us that Jesus *became* sin on our behalf. Read the Old Testament and you’ll surely know that God hates sin. Nonetheless, Jesus endured the cross not as something arbitrary that happened to him, but as something that he was determined to accomplish.

Next, having endured unjust condemnation and humiliation as a criminal, having died an agonizing death, and having drunk to the dregs the cup of God’s wrath, Jesus takes up his life again, ascends to the Father and sits down at the right hand of the throne of God. He *what?* Yes, the man who bore our sin sat down at the place of all authority at the very throne of God never to be moved or shaken, but to rule until all of his enemies are made a footstool for his feet. (Heb 10:13) Whatever questions there may be about Jesus’ character or authority, surely they all cease when we see Jesus at the throne of almighty God. Indeed, everyone will have opportunity to behold Jesus upon this throne, for “every knee shall bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” (Php 2:10-11) Our prayer and motivation is that many people come to see him there *now*.

But there is yet another phrase in this verse that should arrest our thinking: Jesus “for the joy set before him” endured the cross. What was that joy set before him? What was it that *Jesus* was seeing? Was it the resurrection? Certainly that would seem like a thrill to us, but

he told his disciples quite plainly that he would take up his life again. (John 10:17) Was it to sit at the throne of God? But he was before the beginning with God, and all things were created by him and for him (John 1:1, Col 1:16), so the throne was not just where he was going, it was where he had come from.

Was it to accomplish salvation for his people? No doubt that is a part of it, but scripture goes further than just salvation for the people of God. The Bible refers to God’s people, the Church, as the bride of Christ. It says that we have been raised up with Christ and seated with him in the heavenly realm, which indicates that we are to rule with Christ as his bride. (Eph 2:6) We see this practically worked out when we learn that the mysteries of the kingdom of God are to be made known the world through the Church (Eph 3:10)—through every day conversations and decisions to the glory of God. Finally, the book of Revelation speaks of the marriage feast of the Lamb (Jesus) that will take place at the culmination of history. (Rev 19:7-9) Unconstrained joy will belong to both the bride and groom on that day!

Similar truths are expressed in the imagery of the Church as the city of God. Hebrews 11 says that Abraham left his homeland in search of a city whose builder and architect is God. Abraham saw God’s promise of the city of God lived his life accordingly, even though he died in faith never having received the fullness of it. In fact, all people of faith (the Church!) “desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; for He has prepared a city for them.” (Heb 11:10, 16) Isn’t it interesting that Hebrews 12:2 follows right after these references of Hebrews 11? Was the joy set before Jesus the same that Abraham had looked to so many years before?

Shortly after referring to the marriage feast of the Lamb, John describes a city coming down out of heaven. (Rev 21) In this new Jerusalem, lights aren’t needed because God himself is the light of the city. To some this may sound like the stuff of romance novels. To others it’s another expression of the joyous vision that captivated Abraham, John... and Jesus.

Have you seen the promise of the city of God? Can you picture Christ’s bride, the Church, in spotless perfection? Let us fix our eyes on Jesus who for that joy endured the cross.