Hebrews 12: 2 2Let us keep our eyes fixed on Jesus, who is the author of our faith and the one who brings it to its goal. In view of the joy set before him, he endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of God’s throne.

 I want to begin this sermon by talking briefly about what is found in verses 5-6. It says there: **“Have you forgotten the encouragement that addresses you are sons? My son, do not regard the Lord’s discipline lightly, and do not become weary of his correction. For the Lord disciplines the one whom he loves, and he corrects every son he accepts.”**

 In light of this passage and all that it says to us, I ask this question: “Dear believers, why are you distressed? Why would you worry about or question the Lord’s goodness in your life, even in the midst of hardship or trouble?”

 These words tell us that hardships and sufferings are the Lord working in our life for our good. These are not things that are punishments, where you are caused to suffer because someone is unhappy with you and simply wants you to pay the price of sin. Notice I don’t speak of God punishing us. Do you not understand that Jesus paid your price for sin? If that is true, then it is equally true that God does not punish us. What God may do is discipline us. To discipline is to teach or instruct. In fact, the word for discipline is related to the word for a child. The first meaning of the word is: “of rearing and guiding a child toward maturity *training, instruction, discipline.”* When the Lord disciplines he is trying to instruct you, to teach you, to lead you to maturity and the understanding of his goodness and love. The Lord in discipline is trying to draw you nearer to Him. He does this because of his great and unfettered love for you.

 That’s what this section says: **“For the Lord disciplines the one whom he loves.”** Do you know what I think our problem is? All too often, when the turmoil and stress of this world happen (and remember they happen as a result of sin!), we falsely think that the Lord is punishing us. As we think that way, we decide the Lord doesn’t love us and then we begin to think that the Lord is mean and cruel and nothing but angry. It isn’t long after that that we end up rejecting the Lord because, after all, who wants an angry, mean, unloving God? Yet that is entirely false!

 What a difference when you grasp that discipline is the Lord’s love, that God is training and teaching you! Now your attitude in stress and trouble isn’t “what did I do wrong” but rather, “What is God trying to teach me?” Am I being taught to rely on Him all the more? Am I being taught that I am not the boss of anything and that God is the only one who is all-knowing and all powerful! (I think this lesson is very often being taught in our lives, because all too often we have been conned by the world into believing that we are the captains’ of our ship and fate, when nothing is further from the truth!!) Maybe you are just being taught that you aren’t the fixer of anything and that the only reason anything does work out or happen favorably is because of God’s goodness and wonder!

 Take the very issue of your Church and congregation. Every one of us wants our churches to grow and really make an impact on the world. That’s a good thing. But to somehow think that you or the Pastor or this program or that program is the thing that will save souls is totally naïve! God’s Word, specifically the Gospel of God’s Word is how the Holy Spirit tells us he acts and moves in the hearts of humans to call, gather, enlighten and strengthen them in the faith. It is true, our job is to plant the seed, to sow the Word of God in the fields of the world. But whether or not that seed grows and is harvested is solely in the hands of the Lord! When we grasp that sowing the seed is all we can do, and that we need to make sure the seed that is sown is only the best and purest seed, then we will have a better grasp of work we have to do. But trust me, it is not the man or church, it is the Lord that gets the job done.

 So you have troubles and difficulties in your life. Fact is, most of them are caused by us as we ignore and sin against the Lord (in truth all of them are caused by the horror of sin that infects this world)! Yet God in his grace and mercy teaches and trains us in His Wonder and love in those things. Stop shaking your fist at God and accusing him of being loveless. Recognize that He is working in your life for your eternal good at all times. Fall to your knees and humbly pray: “Lord, I believe, help my unbelief! Help me to see your grace and love in my life.”

 That’s the impact of the words of this section. **“The Lord disciplines the one whom he loves.”** Please grasp that you are the one!

 Now why is all of this true? Because of what is said and revealed in the first part of our reading for today. Let’s consider those words under the theme: **EYES ON JESUS!**

 Note how our section starts. **“Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us get rid of every burden and the sin that so easily ensnares us, and let us run with patient endurance the race that is laid out for us.”** Those are some pretty awesome words. Please note the “**Therefore”** right at the beginning. That therefore is a reference to all that was taught before. In this case, because the book of Hebrews is coming to an end that “therefore” refers to the entirety of what has thus far been taught: Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of every jot and tittle of the Old Testament and thus Jesus Christ is our Lord and Savior from sin. The great cloud of witnesses mentioned here is nothing less than the entirety of the history of God working in this world for the salvation of our souls. From beginning to end, God has given us, in His Word, the truth and wonder of every step and promise we need to grasp in his revelation, our redemption in Jesus. We lack nothing!

 That’s why we then hear: **“let us get rid of every burden and the sin that so easily ensnares us.”** Do you think that is telling you that you need to lead a more perfect and holy life? Do you think those words are suggesting that if you would just try a little harder, work a little smarter, and truly, really, really love Jesus you could get saved? Sorry, not even close! Do you know the only way we can get rid of sin and the burden of guilt and shame that sin heaps upon us? It is the way that the Old Testament ceremonial laws proclaimed time and time again. It would be in the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world. It would be in the one and only, the true sacrifice for sins that God was going to bring to his people. It is Jesus. Jesus, because of his redemptive work, because He endured the cross paying for every single sin, and in that atoning work declares us forgiven and saved! Jesus is the only way to get rid of the burden and the ensnaring power of sin.

 That is why we can **“run with patient endurance the race that is laid out for us.”** If you are relying on your power and your stamina to win the race you are in trouble. In fact, if we were to just talk about any of us actually running a race to get saved, most of us, probably about 100 feet past the starting line would be found lying on the ground panting for air and clutching our chests in fear of death! If you really want to know, we are in a race, the very course of our lives that God has laid out for us. I like this picture of the race, because it reminds us of the true difficulty that salvation is…if it is left to our hands. Fact is, we win the race because Jesus carries us. You know, for years there was a father who pushed a wheelchair with his severely handicapped son in it, in many races around the country. I always thought that father and wheel-chaired son was the picture of us in the race of salvation. Only it is Jesus pushing and running and we in the wheelchair! Do know, that Jesus wins every race he enters, meaning that we win simply because of Him! Oh yes, our course is laid out and we do have to get from start to finish. But that will only happen in and with Jesus!

 (The other aspect of the picture of the race laid out for us that I think about is this. Think of all of those people of our world who are given starting dates and times and in fact, actually live their lives at the track, but whose attitude is that the race is stupid!” They refuse to race, to try or to even acknowledge that God has laid out this course for them. Then they have the gall to complain when their race is over and they find that the place where they are is really, really, really hot, forever! Such is our silly world!)

 Then comes the verse that is the heart of everything. **“Let us keep our eyes fixed on Jesus, who is the author of our faith and the one who brings it to its goal. In view of the joy set before him, he endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of God’s throne.”**

 The simple marvel of this verse is totally astounding. It starts by telling us to **“Fix our eyes on Jesus.”** Yes, it means exactly that: stare at, lock your eyes on Jesus. But hold on to that thought for a moment as I tell you why we want to do that.

 We want to do that because **“Jesus is the author of our faith and the one who brings it to its goal.”** There are two very deep thoughts here. First, Jesus is the author of our faith. He thought it up, he recorded it, and he planned every nuance of it out. Yep, he came up with the plot and the characters and the storyline and all that is entailed in putting together anything. If you want, you can call Jesus the architect, the map maker, the designer, the engineer and so on. Any word that says that this person planned it and put it together is what Jesus is about. As God, yes, the fullness of the deity in human form, Jesus is responsible for this plan, this race of faith we are in.

 But then that next awesome phrase. Jesus is **“the one who brings faith to its goal.”** Jesus not only planned everything, Jesus carried out everything flawlessly that it might truly be. No stone was left unturned, no sin not atoned for, no soul was forgotten, not the least particular was overlooked in the salvation of our souls. Jesus did it all! He took care of it all for us! Jesus is the Savior, your Savior, my Savior, and the Savior of all the world! The plan of faith and its goal of eternal life is done!

 I must confess that there are many times when I do have trouble fully grasping and realizing this wonder of Jesus. Some many times it just seems that it would be impossible for the Lord to forgive my sins. And yet he does. Not only my sins, but your sins too! Jesus has paid for the sins of the whole world. And all that Jesus asks is that we believe, we trust and put our entire hope in Him. And here is the real kicker: Jesus sends the Holy Spirit to grant us the gift of this faith, this salvation in Him as the saver of our souls. I don’t believe because I am so good, I believe because Jesus has called me and enlightened me. Jesus has clothed me with his robe of righteousness and declared me an heir of eternal life, his brother or sister, an heir of the eternal kingdom of God!

 Why? Again let this sink in. **“In view of the joy set before him, he endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of God’s throne.”** Jesus lives and rules. Jesus is the complete and total victor in the battle for souls. He sits at the right hand of God because He has totally and completely fulfilled the plan of salvation for the world.

 But do you, can you grasp the phrase: **“in view of the joy set before him?”** I look at the events of the passion and I don’t really see “joy.” I look at Jesus in the garden sweating under the strain of what is to be and I don’t see “joy.” I hear Jesus cry out in total distress **“My God, my God why have you forsaken me,”** that cry that declares the eternity of hell and damnation upon him and I don’t see “joy.” Yet that is what our text tells us. It tells us that because Jesus in his full omniscience and power knew that in these things He would win! He would conquer sin, death and the devil and he would make available to every soul the gift of eternal life and salvation! The joy of Jesus is found in his victory, in the fact that He has saved you and me, yes all who believe and made us children of God and heirs of eternal life.

 Now do you see why our eyes are to be fixed on Jesus. Not on ourselves. Not on our works. Not on whether we clearly see or but through a glass darkly. Our eyes are fixed on Jesus. He takes my rotten soul and purifies it. He grants my dead corpse the life of light and love in Himself. Simply put, Jesus forgives our sins and blesses us with life, true life, pure life, eternal life in Him. We are to fix our eyes on Jesus! In Him we never lose. In him we are never in doubt. In him our race is won, now and always. It is about Jesus. Fix your eyes on Him. Amen.