

Notes on Hebrews 12 : 1 - 2 'Looking ahead – Looking to Jesus'

Over the last couple of weeks, the Alexandra Palace in London has hosted the world darts championship. Though he lost in the final on Thursday night, the standout person has been Luke Littler who reached the final at the astonishing age of 16 years old. His personal goal was to win at least one game thinking he'd probably be home for Christmas, but in lasting three weeks he has inspired a whole new generation to play darts since he began to play when he was only 18 months old. For many of us we are more familiar with the names of Jocky Wilson or Eric Bristow playing in a very smoke-filled hall when you wonder whether they would be able to see anything!! New Year is a time when we are to be inspired, encouraged and envisioned to live differently and last year 30 million of us made resolutions to do just that. After 6 days I am still keen to walk at least 10 thousand steps a day and my watch is very helpful with this, but it is Jesus who inspires me each and every day to live differently each day in a way which resolutions simply can't!!

To live differently is the heart and soul of the book of Hebrews written to Christians who were undergoing really hard times in following Jesus and looking to Jesus is key to how the whole letter works. This is what the writer aspires for them to live out in their lives day by day and he does this by saying that Jesus is better than angels, Moses and even the Law. And though our lives and situations are very different from these first Christians, the letter's heart isn't which is why we need to listen to it. The writer says to these people who he loves, please keep your eyes fixed on Jesus and this is something which is not like a short run sprint, instead it is like running a marathon which requires a long-time focus. The writer writes passionately about this because he is convinced that this is the best way for us to be truly human and he gives two main reasons for this. He says firstly, that when we keep our eyes fixed on Jesus, this is how our faith grows and develops because the heart and soul of faith is for us to become more like Jesus. This is to be our experience day by day in our lives as this is who we will fully and truly one day be when we have been resurrected from the dead. Then, secondly, when we look to Jesus, he both inspires and encourages us to persevere in following and imitating him because he has endured the cross and despised its shame. He did this that he might one day sit down in glory and splendour at the Father's right hand and we are to do the same too that we might receive the same reward.

From now until Easter we will be looking at the 'Engaging with Jesus' part of our Church Members' Covenant and we will be doing this at a very leisurely pace so that we may truly take in all that it says in helping us to

fix our eyes on Jesus. Also, we will be providing on the Wednesdays up to Easter two teaching series. The first will be led by Gerhard and Zania as they continue to encourage us to 'Do Life Together' because fixing our eyes on Jesus is something done best as part of a small group. Such groups provide both encouragement and accountability as it is so easy to deceive ourselves into thinking we're looking at Jesus, whereas we may be looking only at ourselves in a mirror. Then during Lent, we will be either reading the book, or watching the videos, or even both, as we follow the second of the Pete Grieg prayer courses called 'God on Mute'. This book/course describes what it means to look to Jesus during times of personal Disorientation, as the Psalms would say, when we are tempted not to look to Jesus because of personal, or family reasons.

I love having a new diary, as it is filled with so many possibilities because it is so empty. New Year resolutions are deeply selfish in their focus as their focus is solely on me and no one else. This text understands why we may make New Year resolutions, because they echo much of the heart and soul of the Gospel, of us learning to live a renewed life. But we can only learn to live like this not by looking at ourselves in a mirror but by looking to Jesus. This is what the writer encourages us to do and may Jesus continue to be the focus of our lives for each and day of this year.

Questions on Hebrews 12 : 1 - 2 'Looking ahead – Looking to Jesus'

1. Have you made a New Year's resolution this year? If so, what is it and why and if not, why not?
2. Why does the writer of this letter encourage these Christians to keep their eyes fixed on Jesus.
3. Why is fixing our eyes on Jesus more like a marathon than a sprint?
4. Why does fixing our eyes on Jesus make us more truly human?
5. How does our fixing our eyes on Jesus help our faith to grow?
6. When we think of Jesus and how he endured the cross and despised its shame, how does this help us to continue to fix our eyes on him?
7. If you've been to one of Gerhard and Zania's Wednesday evenings or to the first Pete Grieg prayer course, how has this helped you keep your eyes fixed on Jesus and why would you encourage others to go to the ones this coming year?