

UPWARD CALL

I press on toward the finish line, where the prize waiting for me is the upward call of God IN KING JESUS. (Philippians 3:14)

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Joy Set Before Him

Fixing our attention (eyes) on Jesus, the Author (Pioneer, Inaugurator, Leader) and Perfector (Finisher) of **the** faith, who, **in view of the joy set before Him, endured (remained under) the cross**, disregarding (despising) its shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. (Hebrews 12:2)

Without doubt, the year 2020 was a rough year for many. It's hardly necessary to catalogue the many difficulties people encountered last year; we all have some understanding of what they were. So, here we are in a new year, at least as far as the calendar is concerned. Some, perhaps many, start a new year wishfully hoping that things will be better for them, so they look forward to the days ahead.

Interestingly, our Lord Jesus had a moment like that. Jesus was about to have an excruciatingly horrific day as He was about to be nailed to wooden beams (i.e., the cross)—an extreme act of violence meted out by the Romans against those they judged as criminals or rebels against their empire (or for whatever cruel, unjust reason they deemed fit to keep the people in line). Of course, Jesus was none of these, but to fulfill God's preordained plan, it was essential that His Son die such a cruel death. We know the story; it is all part of the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

However, in the midst of such horror, cruelty, and injustice thrust upon the very Creator of all things, Jesus had a new year's day moment where He looked beyond the shame He was facing and beheld with joy what was beyond the cross and the grave. So, we read: *In view of the joy set before Him, He endured the cross, disregarding its shame.* Clearly, Jesus' sight was set on the victory the cross and His subsequent resurrection from the dead were about to bring to not only the human race but to all of creation. Considering what He was about to accomplish—as He took on sin, death, the devil, and the world—in the name of His Father, He saw the joy that was coming on the other side of the cross and the tomb. Peering through the cruelty and injustice of the cross, His view was the joy set before Him.

What was that joy? Clearly, there were several facets of this joy, so let's consider a few. Perhaps there is some encouragement for us in His joy as we begin the year 2021.

The first indication of His joy is discovered in the last part of the opening verse. His joy was to sit down at the right hand of the throne of God. After three decades of walking among His own who rejected Him, He was about to go home to His Father to be with Him or, as the expression goes, to sit at His right hand. We are given a glimpse of this joy in Jesus' prayer to His Father as the cross loomed large on the horizon.

I have glorified Thee on earth, having done perfectly the work which by Thine appointment has been mine to do. And now, Father, do Thou glorify me in Thine own presence, with the glory that I had in Thy presence before the world existed. (John 17:4-5 Weymouth)

Who among mortals could ever probe the unfathomable depths of this prayer to His Father? All we can do is report on it. Jesus longed to be in the heavenly presence of His Father once again. His presence is glory. Surely, just the thought of this reunion was a joy set before the Son of God whom the Father loved before the creation of the world (John 17:24).

As a foreshadow of what was coming, Jesus stood on the mount with three of His disciples and was transfigured before their eyes: *And then, all of a sudden (in their presence), He was transfigured (transformed; changed in external form and appearance) and His face radiated light, like a lamp, and shone like the sun. His outer garments also turned white – bright as the light!* (Matthew 17:2 JM-NT). It was as if He was pregnant with glory and, in that moment, it could not be contained. The Father couldn't contain Himself either as He proclaimed: *"This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased; listen to Him!"* (17:5).

Another indication of the joy set before Him came from His Father who said to Him: *'You are My Son, today I have begotten You. Ask of Me, and I will surely give the nations as Your inheritance, and the very ends of the earth as Your possession.'* (Psalm 2:7-8 NASB)

To be sure, the joy set before Jesus was far more than any of us could comprehend; after all, just as He saw the entirety of creation from the very beginning when He spoke forth *let there be*, so He could see the complete panorama of creation as it becomes God's new creation. But there was something very special and unique in this new creation that must have filled His heart with great joy. It was a new humanity that would be His glorified likeness within this new creation that Paul actually described as a new creation. An intimation of this joy was revealed in Isaiah 8:18: *Behold, I and the children whom the LORD hath given me are for signs and for wonders in Israel from the LORD of hosts, who dwelleth in mount Zion* (Isaiah 8:18). After the cross, Paul tells us who the true Israel is: *For neither is circumcision anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation. And those who will walk by this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God* (Galatians 6:15-16).

The epistle to the Hebrews pulls this joy together for us. Just as Jesus is the author of the faith, so is He described as the author of salvation; but there is something special about this salvation. It is about a people called not only *children*, as recorded in Isaiah and quoted in Hebrews, but also sons who will be brought unto glory. They are one and the same. These are a new creation patterned after the Son of glory.

For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things, and through whom are all things, **in bringing many sons to glory, to perfect the author of their salvation through sufferings**. For both He who sanctifies and those who are sanctified are all from one *Father*; for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren, saying, "I WILL PROCLAIM YOUR NAME TO MY BROTHERS, IN THE MIDST OF THE CONGREGATION I WILL SING YOUR PRAISE." And again, "I WILL PUT MY TRUST IN HIM." And again, **"BEHOLD, I AND THE CHILDREN WHOM GOD HAS GIVEN ME."** (Hebrews 2:10-13 NASB [bold added])

Truly, this was joy set before the Lord Jesus; one that led Him to the cross, *driven by love*.

Dear people of God, the days ahead in this new year will be filled with much peril. We don't know what we will individually face in this dangerous hour and we might be tempted to sink into despair; but don't go there—refuse it. Instead, be like Jesus and look beyond this hour to the joy set before us who have *the faith of Jesus*. Glory awaits the true sons (male and female) of God, for they are a new creation destined to be like the Son of God. John reminds us: *Dear friends, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet been revealed. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him because we will see Him as He is* (1 John 3:2). Oh, what joy—we will be like Him! Let us look off unto Jesus. For God who said, *"Let light shine out of darkness," has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of God's glory in the face of Jesus Christ*" (2 Corinthians 4:6). Let us behold His face in these days by the spirit of the Lord, for the day is fast approaching when we will literally be in the Presence of the joy of our life.