

## FIX YOUR EYES

On September 10 1945 Lloyd Olsen, a farmer in Fruita Colorado, headed out to the barn to get a chicken ready for dinner. Wanting to preserve as much of the neck as possible for his Mother-in-law who was joining them for dinner, he swung his axe at the base of the skull. Rather than die the chicken lived and became a bizarre piece of history. Olsen not only didn't eat the bird, he actually started to care for it. 'Mike' would go through the motions of pecking for food but couldn't get anything. When he tried to crow, only a gurgle came out. The farmer fed this strange chicken with an eyedropper, and after a week of survival, he took Mike to some scientists at the University of Utah. They theorized the chicken had enough brain stem to live without his head.

For another 18 months the chicken lived and grew from a mere 2 1/2 lbs. to nearly 8 lbs. Seeing that there was money to be made Lloyd Olsen took Mike the Headless Chicken on a national tour. Curious sideshow patrons in New York, Atlantic City, Los Angeles, and San Diego lined up to pay 25 cents to see him. Mike the "Wonder Chicken" was valued at \$10,000.00. Mike made it into Life magazine and the Guinness Book of World Records. One night he choked to death on a kernel of corn in an Arizona motel - eighteen months after surviving the chopping block. In March of 2000, a sculpture of Mike the Headless Chicken was unveiled in Fruita. Every year a festival is held to celebrate Mike's will to live. I know you think I made this up but you can check it out at [www.miketheheadlesschicken.org](http://www.miketheheadlesschicken.org).

Mike the headless chicken might describe how many of us feel. We move through the motions of life without the Head of Christ to guide us. We may have movement and life, but not much direction. We move through life on autopilot, never really taking the time to make sure we are going in the right direction.

Today we are finishing our series Forward in Faith. I think it is very fitting that we are celebrating this anniversary today with 10 people getting baptized. Baptism is a time when you publically affirm your faith. You are taking a stand and declaring to everyone that you believe in Jesus as your savior and your intent to follow Him as best you can. This is a very important step that we all take as individuals. It is also important for us as a church.

Heb 12:2 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. 3 Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

This scripture reminds us of 3 foundational truths about Jesus, upon which our church is built.

### 1. Who Jesus is – the beginning and end of our faith

Just as those that have been baptized have done today, I want to affirm again as a church that we believe in Jesus Christ. We believe in the biblical account of His life. We affirm the Apostle's Creed which states "we believe in God the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth, and in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary."

This passage says that Jesus is the author and perfecter (finisher) of our faith. In the verse before this the Christian life is described as a race. Last week we talked about some of the things that motivate us as we run this race. To say that Jesus is our author is to say that He is the one who was with us at the starting line.

Many people struggle with self-worth. From the moment they enter school they are judged by their performance and are taught to measure themselves against others.

The first reason we have worth is because Jesus made us. If I was to paint a picture it would not be worth as much as if Van Gogh or Picasso painted it. The worth of a piece of art is greatly affected by the artist who produced it. We have worth and value not because of what we have done but because of who we are in God's sight. You are valuable to God because He has made you! You need to know who and what you are to run the race as you should.

The worth of an individual is not ascribed by law . . . it's endowed by the Creator. Acceptance of one's intrinsic worth is the core of the personality. When it collapses, everything else begins to quiver.  
-- James Dobson

A nurse named Melanie was on her way to work when something in the trash bin caught her eye. She was immediately taken with the possibilities in the discarded treasure. It was a cello. It was old and slightly cracked in several places, but nonetheless a discard of character, a piece charming to the eye. Her boyfriend, who is a cabinetmaker, also saw the cello's potential. Together they thought it could be turned into a beautifully distinctive CD holder. The discarded cello was indeed old and it had been abandoned, though authorities are not sure why or how it ended up in the trash that day. But a most shocking revelation to the nurse (and arguably to the thief as well) was the fact that it was not merely an old cello. It is one of only 60 like it in the world made by master craftsman Antonio Stradivari in 1684. The 320-year-old masterpiece, valued at 3.5 million dollars, was stolen from a member of the Los Angeles Philharmonic orchestra just weeks before it was rescued in Melanie's apartment with dreams of becoming a CD holder.

Jesus is our author, which means that you are special and precious. Maybe you are here today and you are thinking "I don't FEEL very precious." We all struggle with sin. All of us have blown it in the past. Aren't you glad that Jesus is not only your author but also your perfecter or finisher? One day sin will be dealt with and eliminated. One day we will be recreated and made new.

Jesus is not only with us at the beginning of the race but he is there waiting for us at the end. We have a destiny that is sure and fixed. We have an inheritance which is waiting for us. In our world today there are many huge issues that threaten our future – Ebola, ISIS, global warming etc. People have no idea of where they are going. However, our future is fixed and sure.

2 Corinthians 4:16 Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. 17 For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. 18 So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal

Jesus, our finisher, has gone on before us. We can be certain of what is ahead because he has already been there. Having this assurance means that we can run boldly into the future knowing that, whatever happens to us in life, God is in control and our hope is secure.

2. What Jesus did – died on the cross for our sins

As a church, we also want to affirm this morning the centrality of the cross. This scripture reminds us that Jesus "who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame."

We affirm what it says next in the Apostles Creed that we believe in Jesus who... suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried...

The bible is very clear that it is impossible to earn our salvation.

Philippians 3:7-9 But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. 8 What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ 9 and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ-- the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith.

Hebrews 9:22 In fact, the law requires that nearly everything be cleansed with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.

It says that Jesus who "for the joy set before him". What does that mean? What joy? Does this mean beaten and whipped and nailed to a cross? What was there in the cross that Jesus could possibly find joy in? The answer is ... YOU. He understood that there was no hope of heaven for us without His sacrifice.

Galatians 2:21 I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing!"

The second reason we have worth is the fact that Jesus died for us. The worth of an object is determined by the price someone is willing to pay for it. E.g. Pawn Stars. Jesus was willing to give everything for us. That means that we are priceless.

If the value of an article is dependent upon the price paid for it, Christ's death made our value skyrocket. Let no one say we are worthless. God is not a foolish speculator; he would never invest in worthless property. -- Erwin W. Lutzer

3. Where Jesus is now – seated in heaven and with us always

Lastly, we are to fix our eyes on Jesus who has "sat down at the right hand of the throne of God." Jesus died on the cross but He has risen from the dead and He is alive.

Again, we affirm the Apostles Creed which says that we believe in Jesus who ... ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty; from there he will come to judge the living and the dead. I love how the Message translates this verse;

Heb 12:2 Keep your eyes on Jesus, who both began and finished this race we're in. Study how he did it. Because he never lost sight of where he was headed--that exhilarating finish in and with God--he could put up with anything along the way: cross, shame, whatever. And now he's there, in the place of honor, right alongside God. (MSG)

Because Jesus is alive today we know that He is with us and has promised to never leave us. Jesus is in this race of faith with us. He is not just at the starting line and finish line, He runs beside us even now. He wants to encourage us and strengthen us to finish well.

In the race we run it is easy to grow weary and lose heart. There are good days and bad days. Jesus is not only the one who has created us and has gone before us, he is also running with us every day. He is our ever present help and encouragement. We have someone who is beside us cheering us on as we run.

The Apostles creed ends by reminding us that we believe in the Holy Spirit, the Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and life everlasting. Amen

The Holy Spirit is within us to empower us. God has also given us the church for fellowship and encouragement. Together, they empower us to finish the race.

Is 40:28 Do you not know? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary, and his understanding no one can fathom. 29 He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak. 30 Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; 31 but those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.

Once an eagle reaches maturity, it molts each year. Its beak keeps growing, so even if damaged soon it is as good as new. I was reading that you cannot tell the age of an eagle once it has reached an adult stage. It seems their strength does not diminish. Their color does not fade. They are one of the longest-living of all birds, with a life expectancy of over 25 years in the wild, and having been known to live 50 years in captivity.

Psal 18:31 For who is God besides the LORD? And who is the Rock except our God? 32 It is God who arms me with strength and makes my way perfect. 33 He makes my feet like the feet of a deer; he enables me to stand on the heights.

A famous surgeon was seldom seen on the streets without a beautiful, fresh rose in his lapel. His friends wondered why these buds stayed fresh for so long a time. When they asked him his secret, he turned back the flap of his coat and revealed a little bottle of water into which the stem of the flower had been inserted. So it is with believers. If our lives draw from the great resources of the Lord Jesus, who is in us the Water of Life, we will grow more fragrant and beautiful as the days and years go by.

In the coming year, let's fix our eyes on Jesus. Let's make sure that He is central in everything we do.

Do you know who the world's best basketball free throw shooter is? Michael Jordan? David Robinson? No. A 71 yr. old foot doctor named Tom Amberry! In Nov. 1993 he set world's record with 2,750 in a row! He didn't miss the 2,751<sup>st</sup> shot – they had to close gym for the night. What's his secret? Concentration! “The more I read about it and looked into it, the more I realized the only way you do it is practice. You have to perfect all parts of your technique; then it's just focus and concentration. You have to put all other thoughts out of your mind.” So he bounces the ball three times, focuses, shoots ... swish!

3 sons running in the snow. The one who ran the straightest is the one who kept his eyes on his father.