

10am HC Sunday 17th August 2025

Jer 23:23-29, Heb 11:29-12:2 and Luke 12:49-56 – Looking to a better hope and to a better hero

Are you somebody who likes to read the last line, or the last chapter of a book before you begin it? Do you skim what you're reading, or read it, or listen to it, as the writer intended?

Unlike the letters of Paul, the letter to the Hebrews is more like a speech than a letter. It shows all the signs of having been carefully crafted by somebody who understood the art of rhetoric. So you'll find all the tools of the speech-writer's trade here. It's worth paying attention to how it is written, as well as to what it is saying.

We start with two highlights in the story of the Israelite people. The people of Israel escaping Egypt by walking between a wall of water on their right and a wall of water on their left, and the water then covering Pharaoh's entire army of charioteers. The sound of the trumpets making the walls of Jericho come tumbling down.

Then there's a roll-call of the people involved in some of those big dramatic moments: a prostitute and a priest mixed up with prophets and freedom fighters. And then the stories of valour morph into a different kind of courage. Not the courage that leads armies into victory, but the courage that holds up under persecution.

The emphasis is on faith in God. **By faith** this thing happened, and **by faith** that thing happened. When the writer with no time to tell every tale speeds up the narrative, the implication is that all this bravery and adventure, this endurance and fortitude, was driven by faith in God and in his plans.

It would be easy to assume this is a call to be just as courageous, sturdy, stubborn, and single-mindedly set on suffering for our faith as these folk of yesteryear. Because only by stretching ourselves to the utmost will we achieve all that God intends for us. And that is where we would be wrong.

Because the speech-writer suddenly does a pivot. A hand-brake turn that comes in v34.

I'll just read this: ***Yet all these, though they were commended for their faith, did not receive what was promised, since God had provided something better so that they would not, without us, be made perfect.***

Those faithful folk living in the Old Testament times, and in the years before Christ came, could not know that ***God had provided something better***, by which they would ***be made perfect***, which is the death and the resurrection of Jesus. Their belief in God gave them a hope that they could onto, but we, like the people to whom this letter is written, know that ***we have a better hope***. Because we, like the people to whom this letter is written, are living on the other side of Jesus' death and resurrection. We know that with Jesus' death and resurrection, our sin was paid for, and death was defeated. We know that ***we have a better hope***.

Those people of faith, who trusted in God, and were willing to give him their all were definitely heroes. But we, who live with the knowledge of all that Jesus did, know that **we have a better hero**. As we ***run with perseverance the race that is set before us***, we are ***looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith***.

Jesus is the one who has gone before us, has reached our heavenly home, and ***has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God***. Jesus will lead us there. For as Jesus himself promised the disciples, he is ***the way, the truth and the life***.

And when we remember that Jesus faithfully completed his own mission- that mission being, in his own words, ***to give his life as a ransom for many*** - we can understand how Jesus, in his faith, becomes ***the perfecter of our faith***. With the work of Jesus on the cross, everything needed to reconcile us to God has been done.

The pen that signed the peace treaty has been laid down.

The last lock in the set of prison doors has been de-activated, and the last door has sprung open.

No longer at war with God, or prisoners to sin, we can live as free people.

But there's even more. Because in seeing how Jesus completed his mission ***enduring the cross [and] disregarding its shame***, and all ***for the joy that was set before him***, we see how our faith has been perfected. His example shows us how to live our own life of faith: our minds focussed on the future, and on our new relationship with God our Father.

We're not in isolation as we do this. We have the support of faithful people, past, present and future.

Mexico City has a huge mural, painted by Diego Rivera in 1947 for the dining room of the Hotel Prado. It is called *Dream of a Sunday afternoon in Alameda Park*, and it is full of movement and incident. There are well-dressed ladies, a balloon-seller, a dog barking at a soldier, a girl with a baby, a war veteran, and a man in a hot-air balloon. But look closely at the people, and you recognise them as key figures in Mexico's history and its struggle for independence.

The writer of Hebrews imagines us, similarly, ***surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses*** to God and to his purposes. Not just the Top Trump heroes of Old Testament times, but also the many saints since them. And remembering their willingness to trust in God, should stir us: to ***lay aside every weight ...the sin that clings so closely*** - everything that would get in the way of us pressing on in the race that has been marked out for us - so that we can go on without hindrance. Even things that ought to be good for us can get in the way if we spend too much time on them or pay too much attention to them.

Because we are called to fix our eyes upon Jesus and on his unwavering commitment to doing the will of the Father. To keep in mind that Jesus has already done everything necessary for us to be fully reconciled with God. By looking to that promise of eternal life with God, to that better hope, and by looking to Jesus, to that better hero, we can run the race that has been set before us.