

## **Make Sure Of Your Focus!**

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The title of my sermon for this morning is "Make Sure of Your Focus." It is directly tied to the themes that I have begun back at the last sermon that I gave in July and then the sermon I gave, I believe it was last Sabbath, and this one is tied into the five or six years after we leave the Feast of Tabernacles. Because I think that that has an opportunity to be a place of potentially very great growth for those of us in the Church of the Great God.

I want this quotation that I will give you in a moment to be a guide for the theme for this sermon, which I intend for you to apply as a "be alert" for what we might face as we leave the festival season behind and head back to this world of confusing and dispiriting uncertainties. Now, this quotation was made by George Peabody and I would really be surprised if anybody in here ever heard of him. I never heard of George Peabody, but it piqued my interest. And so I did a little bit of looking up and I will get to that in just a moment. Because I cannot recall ever hearing of him before until I began preparing this sermon.

But I looked him up on Google and discovered he became very wealthy selling dry goods. I believe it was in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. But then he moved into banking, representing American banking interests in London, England, and eventually he moved back to the United States again. He is recognized for two qualities. One was his banking astuteness representing American business interests in London. And he is especially recognized as one of the fathers of philanthropy and it is really there that he made his name. As a banker he did not really make a name but in philanthropy he actually made his name and he made it because of his interest in philanthropy.

Here is the definition of philanthropy: It is the effort to promote happiness or social elevation by making donations from one's wealth.

Well, because he was involved in those two businesses, that is, the selling of dry goods and in banking as well, he moved in pretty wealthy circles and he began to hear in the conversations of some of those people who had a lot more money than even he did (he was pretty wealthy but these people had a lot more money than he did), and one of their comments and complaints was that they would contribute more money to charity if they were sure that the charities were going to be honest in the distribution of the money that they gave. I am talking here about people like the Fords and the Mellons.

You see, he moved in those kind of circles in Philadelphia, and somehow or another, this contact with these people led him to work for the United States government in one particular area that had to do with charitable giving. And he is one of the fathers of philanthropy because it was he who organized a great deal of what we know of here in this area as 501(c)(3) charitable organizations. He did not found them, but those things were organized by him and put it into the position where people like the Fords and the Mellons and so forth, were willing to give of their money because the charities were being checked out as not nothing but scams that were run by people who had the opportunity to do so. And so that is why he is recognized as one of the fathers of modern philanthropy.

I do not know the situation existing about which he stated that I will quote, but I believe that the sense of this statement is fitting for what I believe our looming circumstances in American life seem to be headed toward. Like I said, I do not know what was going on, but it is an appropriate statement for us that we have this in mind going back to the world that we live in. George Peabody said this: "Our task is not to bring order out of chaos, but to get work done in the midst of chaos."

I will make that more direct. What *we* have to do when we get out of here, out of the Feast of Tabernacles, and back to work once again in our areas, is to truly work at our calling without allowing distractions to God's calling deter us from our responsibilities to the Father and the Son.

I will give you that again. I think that he might have said this as they began their work on the charitable giving for the United States of America. He said, "Our task is not to bring order out of chaos," because that is what his rich friends were saying. They would give more money in charitable giving if it

was not so chaotic. And whether they understood that their money was being wisely invested there. "Our task is not to bring order out of chaos, but to get work done in the midst of chaos."

And so I interpreted it this way—what we have to do is to truly work at our calling without allowing distractions to God's calling deter us from our responsibilities to the Father and the Son. That is Job Number One in our lives.

Now, I presently believe that despite the bad reports we are hearing week after week, I do not believe the bottom has yet been hit in this nation regarding America's godless and great immorality, nor our political, educational, economic, and religious declines as well. But America's declines will impact on us. It cannot help but do it. We live here and it is going to affect us. I also do not believe at this time that Christ will return within the coming five years or so. That is just my personal opinion and it is based mostly on an absence of certain events that are to happen outside the borders of this nation and Britain as the beast rises to clearer recognition.

Brethren, where is the one that the Bible calls the beast? Who is he? I am not hearing of him operating outside the borders of this nation. But nonetheless, I believe that we will hear more bad news and more intensifying anger like we are already hearing, only it will be still gradually and continuously worsening. In other words, this gradually intensifying chaos we are living in, right on the edge of, will continue peaking and there will be no times of real peace. Remember I am talking about the next five years or so.

In one sense, it seems to me that Christ's return is taking a long, long time coming. But I also believe that is good. I once heard a man say regarding the slowness of a continuing bleeding of a wealthy nation's wealth. This comment was "that it takes a long time to bleed an elephant to death." He meant the nation that was being bled was really nothing but a big fat elephant anyway. But it takes a long time to bring it down.

Nonetheless, this creative process of getting the world prepared for Christ's return creates circumstances that can be a significant danger to our salvation if we are not on the alert. And even though bombs are not falling from the sky and massive explosions are not going off, the wearying effect of what we

are already aware of not only takes longer, but it can be every bit as destructive to one's spiritual well being. It wears you out getting constantly bad news of the country that you live in, that you love.

But God has willed that we must go through it even though James 3:18 clearly states that the fruits of righteousness are sown in peace by those who make peace. Peace is what is best for God's children to produce through its continued growth. But God has willed this state that we are now living in for right now. How long can one live through constant uncertainty with the pressures constantly rising and still glorify the Lord Christ? With God's help it can be done and it becomes more difficult in terms of a test of our faith. But let us face it brethren, we must not allow ourselves to become weary in well doing.

What is unfolding within the Israelitish nations is broadly described in the verses that I will show you momentarily. And as things now stand, there is no way to stop them. God Himself will have to do it and He may determine to allow the intensity to rise even higher. So turn with me in the book of Ezekiel, chapter 33.

**Ezekiel 33:1-7** Again the word of the Lord came to me, saying, "Son of man, speak to the children of your people, and say to them: 'When I bring the sword upon a land, and the people of the land take a man from their territory and make him their watchman, when he sees the sword coming upon the land, if he blows the trumpet and warns the people, then whoever hears the sound of the trumpet and does not take warning, if the sword comes and takes him away, that person's blood shall be on his own head. [Put yourself in that position.] He heard the sound of the trumpet, but did not take warning; his blood shall be upon himself. But he who takes warning will save his life. But if the watchman sees the sword coming and does not blow the trumpet, and the people are not warned, and the sword comes and takes any person from among them, he is taken away in his iniquity; but his blood I will require at the watchman's hand.' So you, son of man: I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel; therefore you shall hear a word from My mouth and warn them for Me."

As I was preparing a comment regarding these verses, it dawned on me that from the time that the angels that God had established to live on and to govern this planet before mankind was created, there have been only short periods, short spurts of peace on earth. There have been almost no *extended* times of peace. Now, God and His people have almost always had to contend with opponents because the carnal mind is almost always working overtime in order to satisfy its owner's desires. And here we are, anticipating more of the same in our very own homeland.

Now, here is what research regarding ancient watchmen revealed. First of all, they were a standard military position in the Israelite army. If any of you saw the movie series, *The Lord of the Rings*, you saw some of them deployed in the most normal operating location in one of the series and I believe that that one was the final one, *The Return of the King*. Now, the Israelite watchmen were normally stationed in strategic locations, usually on top of a mountain, and he possessed right at his side the makings of a huge bonfire they would light and give warning if the enemy army had arrived.

Take special notice of what verse 4 clearly states. We will read it again. "Then whoever hears the sound of the trumpet and *does not take warning*, if the sword comes and takes him away, his blood shall be on his own head." A person positioned on the top of a mountain with fire ready to go right at his side, the fire could have been, metaphorically, the trumpet. Now, what does the watchman do to earn his pay? He observes, he is a lookout. He is especially trained to be alert, observe potentially dangerous situations, and sound out the warnings to his countrymen that they must be alert for harmful circumstances that they might otherwise be unaware of.

Now, in the church, this responsibility has been given to the ministry.

I will read two verses from the Amplified Bible as God provides the ministry with these responsibilities. It is possible that both of these were authored by Paul and I know for sure the first one here in Acts 20 that Paul was the actual speaker. He was telling these people as he was leaving the Ephesian area and he was going elsewhere. He went to Rome. He wanted to go to Spain. I am not sure he ever got there, but he possibly did. But he was heading west and he had spent a wonderful three years or so there and now he was leaving them and going to pastor to others. He is telling these people:

**Acts 20:31** (AMP) Therefore be always alert and on your guard, being mindful that for three years I never stopped night or day seriously to admonish and advise and exhort you one by one with tears.

Boy, he took his job seriously. I kid you not.

The second one, he may also have written. It is in Hebrews 13.

**Hebrews 13:17** (AMP) Obey your spiritual leaders and submit to them [continually recognizing their authority over you], for they are constantly keeping watch over your souls and guarding your spiritual welfare, as men who will have to render account [of their trust]. [Do your part to] let them do this with gladness and not with sighing and groaning, for that would not be profitable to you [either].

But then watching church members have their responsibility along with the watchman as well because they have to get ready to run or whatever needs to be done to get out of the way of the army that is invading.

In Ezekiel 33:1-7, this responsibility was given directly to a duly appointed prophet of our God. That is, Ezekiel. And it is not fully intended for you and me to be performing this service on the behalf of our Savior in the streets of the cities where we live. But nonetheless, the principal revelations given here may apply to an individual member at times in very small measures when the occasions are clearly appropriate.

For example, you may recognize in the drift of a conversation you are having with an acquaintance that are amenable to end time events, including the return of Jesus Christ, and some other end time events, then maybe we are to follow the warning admonishment given. But I do not believe that would occur very often. However, as things now stand in our world, the die definitely seems set against the recovery of this nation. Remember, I am still thinking about the next five years or so and what we have to get done in our time given us by God.

Now, the overall subject of this sermon may seem unusual for this specific festival, but I consider this subject to always be of prime importance because of a simple reality we are all aware of. And that is, when do we really start thinking seriously enough about the costs involved to us personally if we are *not* headed in the right direction now during the assigned pilgrimage that God gave us? If you remember my sermon on the pilgrimage, God gives the pilgrimage. He knows what we need and He sets up a pattern for our development, the finishing of the product that He is making.

I mean, thinking seriously enough that our thought processes about our calling actually motivates us to steadily work on our relationship with Jesus Christ and steadily work on a program that we have devised of overcoming a weakness and department issues in our faith that truly needs to be overcome. When are we going to get working on it? How long are we going to wait? God wants us to be doing that *right now* because God already set our course right from the beginning of our calling. Our course, our journey, our pilgrimage will definitely end. But where will we be then in terms of a state of growth that God has patterned for us? Boy, when I think of how much time I have wasted already! Evelyn and I were called at the very beginning of 1959. We believe that we heard the first program of the year that Mr. Armstrong gave on a Sunday, the first week of January.

We do know (all of us are in the know to some degree) that life on the whole is gradually becoming, here in the United States of America and Britain, more erratic emotionally. Will it be with many things in our relationship with Christ left undone?

There are changes that we can make in our spiritual practices to keep loose ends at a minimum. Because I believe that this specific festival is really, and I mean especially meaningful to our growth—the Feast of Trumpets this year. Trumpets is the festival that designates when all the chips are on the table. It is as though there is nothing left to play. (You can think of a card game.) I was told when I was attending Ambassador College classes that there is nothing more written in the Bible that touches on this festival we are observing right now than any of the others. I have heard speculations from the teacher that it is entirely possible that there is more written about or touches on Trumpets than all the others put together in the Bible.

As in playing cards, Trumpets is somewhat like the last hand for us on what this day commemorates. Because on this day that we are observing, we learn whether we passed or failed. Think off in the future. When was the first time that you kept Trumpets? And how many now have you kept? They keep rolling closer to us every single second. We keep another one—and on one of these Christ *is* going to return. The time is winding down. On Trumpets we learn whether we ended at the correct destination or at some place other than the right place.

Well, I want to help you lessen the possibility that we end at the wrong destination as much as I can and I want to help you lessen the distractions that get in the way of your accomplishments. That is my responsibility before God to each of you. We live in a world filled with challenges aimed toward the destruction of the faith that we already have. I am not exaggerating.

The world, as the term is used spiritually, is *the* greatest distraction of all, in a generality. A world like this one that we live in has, to the best of my knowledge, never existed in this arrangement before. Never before! Never, as far as I know, have so many tempting, time-wasting distractions been available by doing nothing more than merely flipping an electrical switch. There have always been distractions to a mind seeking them, but never so many, and never so many readily available in such a tremendous onslaught of easy availability with already prepackaged electronic mechanisms, travel facilities, food, clothing, tools, and entertainment, and active recreation that consumes time! And how much of it, brethren, is simply wasted doing nothing except daydreaming?

Here is a question: What is it that triggers *your* interest? You have interests and here all these gadgets out there that we can get, that we can watch, that we can ride, that we can play with, or whatever. What is it that triggers your interest? Well, maybe it will be none of them, but something is out there to trigger your interest in something. They are there. But whatever it is, it is probably available almost, as the saying goes, "in the blink of an eye."

This, in one sense, may be the most challenging time to our fully involved attention to God's purpose within the history of God's desire to create a family of beings like Himself and Jesus Christ. God really allowed this world

right now to be crowded with interests. I mean, *crowded* with something to draw our attention. So it is truly a significant honor to be given this calling at what is building toward the most significant occurrence in the history of God's plan. That is, Christ's return and the establishment of the Kingdom right here on earth.

Now, here in the United States, this nation has gone through one of the most acrimonious presidential campaigns in a long, long time. All by itself, that election campaign was possibly far more than a mere four year distraction that is still drawing people's attention and attracting us to some degree. Look, it attracted my attention for this sermon. So, how much of what was going on for those four years did you pay attention to? You could not avoid it! Every angle that was put on the radio, we saw on television or whatever. It was with us night and day for four years. And how much time did it burn? Because even after watching or listening to something about it, we carried it with us and talked about it to somebody else. These things are not evil of and by themselves, they are just there, and God is allowing them to attract our attention.

Perhaps the last time words this bitter all over the nation might have been in the campaigning in which Abraham Lincoln ran against two other candidates and he just barely won, even though he was actually out-voted by the combined vote totals of the other two candidates. But out of that turmoil, Americans were probably given, with the possible exception of George Washington, the very best president for the times who could have served in that position at that time.

The bitter war of words in this most recent campaign we have just experienced these past four years with so much barely-suppressed hatred, are honest indications that there is no way that we can fully escape a negative effect from them. We cannot run from it. It is there and it is going to be on television, it is going to be on radio, we are going to hear speeches about it, you are going to hear sermons about it.

There is no way to get away from it and it will affect you to some degree. We cannot avoid. It is part of this world, but we can at least make the effort

to avoid it as much as we possibly can because we know it is out there, and already rabid speculations have been made that Trump is going to run again. You see, he thinks he can beat him [Biden] this time. So we will see.

One of the elements produced during this last four years is already a major distraction because it has become the zeitgeist of our times. If you do not know what zeitgeist means, it is a German term identifying that spirit that is ever-present within the times we are passing through to bend our attitudes and deportment to what everybody else is doing. This is a major problem we all have, we cannot get away from it, it is there. Are we going to allow it in some way to shape our mind, to shape our deportment, to shape our position with God? Because it is going to be there.

That influence—zeitgeist—is no laughing matter and it is almost never a good spirit, that is, the zeitgeist, that is pleasing to God. And so if it is not pleasing to God, maybe it should not be pleasing to us either.

So here is the warning. We must be aware of it, it is going to be out there, and we are going to have to resist its influence.

Now, the reason I am thinking about this subject is because I know that I fear being distracted from what should be of prime overall concern in my life. I get distracted. In fact, I think sometimes I am too easily distracted. I am interested in everything. My mind is all over the place. I am not kidding you. I see something, I wonder: can I use it for a sermon? And I know the other men are this way too to some degree because they have the kind of minds that are interested in things and want to know if it can be a teaching tool somewhere. That is my excuse anyway.

I will confess that my focus, my prime concern, that is, the way that I think I should be in terms of intensity, and it is not pleasing to me when I catch myself paying attention to things I should not focus on. Those things may not always hold my attention for very long, but they do hold it for a while.

The main theme of this sermon is about being focused. To be focused, in this sermon, means to have your mind concentrated upon that which is of greatest

interest to you and that you truly want to succeed in doing well within it and to do well in its behalf as well. And your great desire, brethren, is to be a truly good representative of God's way of life.

Of course I wrote that hoping that your great interest that you are focused on is the calling that God gave to you and your family. And so you work toward that almost constantly. That is what we are employed for now. It is my hope that your overall focus in your life is fulfilling your calling.

Now focus has several technical definitions, but I want to zero in on those definitions that fit into fulfilling our calling. Overall, focus describes the very center of one's interest and thus is given our prime attention. And it is that interest that we feel also that we *owe* our attention to. Now, does it go that far? Do you feel as though you owe your attention to God and Jesus Christ in His calling? Is it that project which receives the most sustained attention? Focusing, brethren, is sometimes very difficult in this busy world and requires concentrated effort.

Here are a number of some very brief, pretty much single word synonyms, definitions, used on occasions by writers and speakers frequently in order to avoid overusing the term focus. Terms like sharp, sharply defined, clear, clear-cut, centered, distinct, concentrated, bring to bear, zeroed in on.

Before moving on, let us look at this term from a reverse angle. What is the great enemy of focus? We need to focus more than we do. What is the great enemy of focus? Well, it is something that everybody is susceptible to and thus being trapped by it can happen at almost any time except those times when one is *really* working to hold his mind to stay focused. Being focused requires energy to do so and being totally alone does not guarantee no distractions.

Brethren, this enemy I am going to name can happen so easily and unexpectedly that one has to pay attention. But even though you are paying attention, it will happen, I can guarantee it. We are dealing here with an absolute. It is *distraction*. You cannot go through a day without being distracted by something, and neither can I. And even if we vow to ourself, "I'm not going to let myself be distracted," we get distracted because the kids do it. This is what I mean when I say you cannot avoid it totally. It *is* going

to happen. Everybody is susceptible. The key, brethren, is how long do we hold on to it?

This term, distraction, has an interesting source. It came into English from a Latin root which means "to draw." Not with one's hand but to draw as in putting a sipping straw in your mouth and sucking on it. That is what distraction does. It pulls you right in. It also was used in Latin "to pull," as in pulling in a fish that you have just caught. It was also used in Latin as "divert," as in changing the direction of something, so nothing will be damaged.

But in our subject at this time, a distraction is what pulls, it draws, it diverts the mind, which in turn creates an interruption of thought and often as action as well. Distraction is truly a multi, multi, multi-faceted enemy of even intensely concentrated accomplishment. Nobody escapes it. And as hard as we try to be not distracted, it happens anyway because the kids do it or something goes boom out on the street, you name it, and there is a possibility that we will be distracted by it. Like I said, the key is to make sure it is over in a second, and sometimes that takes a great deal of intensive concentration.

Distractions are all the things that occupy our attention enough to get a rise out of us. You know what I mean. Now I read what I am now going to relate to you because it illustrates how easily distractions affect our thinking at almost any time despite our best efforts to not allow it to happen. What I am going to read to you was actually purposely filmed and inserted into the movie "Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves" because it served a purpose within the storyline.

In their forest preserve Kevin Costner, as Robin, comes to a young man with a bow taking aim at an archery target. Robin asked the boy, "Can you shoot amid distractions?" The boy takes up the challenge with Robin right there to witness his expertise with his weapon, a bow and arrow. Just a millisecond before the boy releases the string, Robin tickled the boy's ear with the feathers of an arrow that he was carrying. The boy's shot flies high, missing the target by several feet and everybody watching laughs. After the laughter of those watching dies down, Maid Marian, standing behind the boy, challenges Robin, "Can *you* shoot accurately amid

distraction?" Robin Hood takes his bow and takes aim and just as he releases the arrow, Maid Marion leans beside him and flirtatiously blows into his face and the arrow misses the target like the boy's shot and glances off the tree behind it and just barely misses a bystander.

Even the experts are bothered by distraction and this is the hard part. It does not take much to distract us. This was a feather! Now what is a possible lesson for us? What is it that might distract us so we miss God's mark set for us to achieve?

The Greek term translated into English in the New Testament is *hamartia*. It means in Greek "to miss the mark." That is what sin is. It is to miss the mark like Robin did because his girlfriend blew in his face. *Hamartia* is a shooting term and is the single Greek term most comprehensively used throughout the New Testament and it is translated into English as *sin*—to miss the mark.

Here is a second illustration that I want to give to you but this one literally happened to the people who experienced it. This was a literal, real life event and it saved the lives of the three men flying the Apollo 13 space mission which experienced a major number of what might seem like minor breakdowns to you and me but the astronauts really experienced. This was not a made up fictional movie scene.

On day six of this seemingly ill-fated mission, the astronauts needed to make a critical course correction. They are up in the sky there and there are no signs that said "go this way." But they knew they were off target and they had to make a correction. But that presented another difficulty because if they failed to do it or failed in attempting to do it, the direction that they were headed might allow them to never return to earth. They had to get back on track. So to conserve power, they first had to shut down the onboard computer. That is what steers the craft. They had to shut it down. But even with that accomplishment, that adjustment, the astronauts still needed to conduct a 39 second burn by turning the main engines back on again or they would miss their destination and that was Planet Earth. How then could they steer accurately in what posed the problem because they did not know when they turned the

engines back on again what direction the engines would actually push the spacecraft! It might push them further off course. They needed to point the craft in a very definite direction. Astronaut Jim Lovell determined that if they could keep a fixed point in space in view through their tiny window, he could steer the craft accurately manually. That main focal point turned out to be Planet Earth, but now they were off course. Then in order to get back on course (as shown in the movie) for 39 agonizing seconds, Lovell focused on keeping earth in view through his tiny window and by not losing his focus on that reference point as he manually steered the craft. He did it and the three astronauts avoided disaster.

Now, I am giving these to show you what the result of distraction is. It takes a person off course. Please understand. That is the whole point of what I am talking about up here. Distraction from our center focus—God's calling—takes us off course.

Here is the final one. This one ended in tragedy.

It was taken from an interview of Mrs. Karl Wallenda. Some of you young folks might not know the Wallenda name. The Wallenda family produced probably the greatest team of aerialists and tightrope walkers ever seen in our times. Tightrope walking requires very, very intense concentration. They were not faking it when they performed, their lives were on the line. People were watching the real deal when Karl Wallenda fell from a cable in San Juan, Puerto Rico a few years ago and later Mrs. Wallenda, listen to this, said that before her husband had fallen, for the first time since she had known him, he was concentrating on falling instead of walking the tightrope. He broke his concentration on what his skill was in. She added that he personally supervised the attachment of the guide wires which he had never done before. That showed her the state of his mind. She said he had his mind on the wrong things prior to that walk and he failed and he died. A break in concentration distracted him.

Let us turn to Hebrews chapter 12. These are really significant verses, probably from the apostle Paul. Just guessing here but it seems likely. Listen to what he says:

**Hebrews 12:1-2** Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so a great cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

I am going to read these verses from three different translations but these are all thought-for-thought translations. That is not word-for-word but thought-for-thought, and there are three words I want you to sort of note each and every time we go through these. Those words are encumbrance, fixed, and particular race. I will define them briefly after reading the verses. The first one is from the New American Standard Bible.

**Hebrews 12:1-2 (NASB)** Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

This next one comes from the Amplified Version of the New King James.

**Hebrews 12:1-2 (AMP)** Therefore then, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses [who have borne testimony to the Truth], let us strip off and throw aside every encumbrance (unnecessary weight) and that sin which so readily (deftly and cleverly) clings to and entangles us, and let us run with patient endurance and steady and active persistence the appointed course that is set before us. Looking away [from all that will distract] to

Jesus, Who is the Leader and the Source of our faith [giving the first incentive for our belief] and is also its Finisher [bringing it to maturity and perfection]. He, for the joy [of obtaining the prize] that was set before Him, endured the cross, despising and ignoring the shame, and is now seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

That is beautiful.

The last one is from The Living Bible.

**Hebrews 12:1-2** (TLB) Since we have such a huge crowd of men of faith watching us from the grandstands, let us strip off anything that slows us down or holds us back, especially those sins that wrap themselves so tightly around our feet and trip us up; and let us run with patience the particular race that God has set before us. Keep your eyes on Jesus, our leader and instructor. He was willing to die a shameful death on the cross because of the joy he knew would be his afterwards; and now he sits in the place of honor by the throne of God.

Now let us look at those three words.

*Encumbrance* is a weight that one has to bear up under. Brethren, if we allow things to distract us, we are losing time. We have to carry that with us. That is time we lost. It could be something physically carried or a mental burden like a distraction. Whichever, it really, really holds one back from accomplishment. If you spoke a rare Russian dialect and you emigrated the USA, your lack of English would truly be an encumbrance—a burden. It would put you in a bind. It would hamper you, impede progress severely. A cross you would have to bear. It would be a major, major distraction until it is overcome.

The word *fixed* in this case has nothing to do with repairing. It has everything to do with being stationary bridges, remaining in possession, steady and intent. The astronaut had to keep his eyes rigidly fixed through that tiny window on that pinpoint of light called earth, while he steered the spacecraft by hand for 39 seconds. That was no small task and it saved two other men's lives.

*Particular race.* That, brethren, is the journey God has assigned us when He called us and set us on our way towards Him and His Son and our elder brother, and Their wonderful creative abilities to be reworked into something useful within His Family.

Brethren, distraction produces nothing good toward the Kingdom.

This is kind of humorous, but my father-in-law had a humorous saying when he really was not pleased with the quality of the work that he produced within the midst of a number of distractions. I can still see him in my mind's eye. He would look somewhat askance at what he had done, and he would say, "Well, I guess a blind man riding by on a horse would never notice."

Distraction's first product, I believe, is at least a break in thought away from directness of thought toward a goal that one has established that they want to accomplish. However, what enters instead is a mental movement toward *randomness* in thinking instead of resolving the new thought. And this is combined with at least a small measure of confusion and we may think or even say something like, "Now, where was I?" Which then goes on to include wasting of time in order to get back on track. Neglect, carelessness, and slipshod quality work with disconnections in thought, the leaving of things unexplained and undone, inattention to detail, and finally, some indifference regarding the overall quality of the product.

Brethren, all of these things can really, *really* be irritating. But that is not my real concern. My real concern here is this: my concern at this time is on Demas, who was mentioned in the Scriptures, and we will pick that up in another sermon.