

July 29, 2018
Sunday Evening Service
Series: Communion
Community Baptist Church
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Greer, SC 29650
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RUNNING WITH OUR EYES ON JESUS **Hebrews 12:1-2**

The Bible does not give much definition of faith. We learn from Hebrews 11:1 that *faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen*. Generally, when asked for a definition of faith, or when asked what faith is, we respond with this statement. Then of course we are required to define the definition. What is meant by *the assurance of things hoped for*? What is meant by *the conviction of things not seen*?

Instead of establishing multiple definitions of faith, the Bible demonstrates faith, illustrates faith, or explains faith by examples. Faith is not a concept. Faith is not a theory. Faith is not a topic of theological discussion. Faith is what we do. More accurately, faith is the lifestyle of a person who has experienced Jesus's challenge to believe Him. How many times did Jesus tell us that we need to believe? He told Nicodemus, *"And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life. For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God"* (John 3:14-18).

Jesus told the doubters at the feast in Jerusalem, *"Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life"* (John 5:24).

Jesus challenged the skeptics who wanted free food, *"Do not labor for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you. For on him God the Father has set his seal."* Then they said to him, *"What must we do, to be doing the works of God?"* Jesus answered them, *"This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent"* (John 6:27-29).

When God gives light and life to a sinner who is dead in sin so that the sinner believes Christ, everything changes. From that moment, the newly born saint lives by faith. That is the truth that changed Martin Luther's life. He was smitten with the fact that in the gospel, *The righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, "The righteous shall live by faith"* (Romans 1:17).

By our lives, we who are born again, define faith. What is faith? Watch how a believer lives. What does faith do? Watch the believer's life. The writer to the Hebrew Christians explained this connection well. From the first two verses of chapter twelve we learn why God expects us to demonstrate, illustrate, define, and exemplify faith by the way we live.

Our Race (v.1).

We run like others who have run before us. *Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses (v.1a)*. There are examples of people who lived by faith (11:1-40). That is what chapter eleven was about. "Therefore" connects this instruction with the examples of faith given in the previous chapter.

Looking back at those heroes listed, we should stop to consider briefly runners like Abel who trusted God so much that his offering to God caused his martyrdom. Or Noah who was no doubt mocked for living by faith and building the ark. Then there was Abraham who spent his entire life for nearly 100 years waiting for God to keep His promise. And Joseph who endured prison, but trusted God to keep His promise to the point that he required his children to bury him in the Promised Land. Or Moses who chose to side with the slaves of God rather than become the Pharaoh. How does your race compare to theirs?

We are surrounded by those witnesses. In some way, those people who trusted God with life unto eternity witness our running. Some preachers in the past have said that these witnesses are gathering in heaven watching over our race. Some have said that they sit in the grandstands in the sky and cheer us on. No Scripture indicates that the departed saints can observe what is taking place on earth. However, it is plain that God sees and knows what is happening in our races. There is also an indication in Scripture that angels can see events on earth.

But it is not likely that the heroes listed are sitting in grandstands watching us. Rather these heroes of faith are witnesses that God is faithful to His promises, that God's grace is sufficient. Their lives witness to the fact that God can be trusted. Their lives speak like Abel's does: *And through his faith, though he died, he still speaks (Hebrews 11:4).*

Another truth we gain by reading about those heroes of faith is that you and I are not the only runners. Multitudes have run the race before you and have completed the race successfully. Multitudes are still running along with you and affirming that God's grace is sufficient in the race. Multitudes are saying by their testimony, "Get up. Try again. Keep pressing. Keep trusting God. You can complete the race."

The text also teaches us that when we run our race, we must run with discipline. *Let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely (v.1b).* Like runners in a race, we divest ourselves of unnecessary weight. A weight is a burden, a bulky mass, an encumbrance that becomes a liability. These are the things that just kind of stick to us as we try to live life. It is like walking through a field only to realize that your clothing is covered with "stick tights."

Weights are the so-called "necessities" of life. They can be ambitions, goals, past times, or hobbies. Great and harmful weight in a race comes from peer pressure that encourages you to have this experience or that experience, or eat here or there, or attend a concert or take a certain kind of vacation. None of these things are particularly wrong. The problem is that they distract us from our real purpose in life.

It is good and necessary for us to review our day to determine how much hindering weight we have picked up. Review your day and

realize that you have approximately 16 hours in which to accomplish stuff. What stuff do you feel you must accomplish? What percentage of time do you spend focusing on Christ through Bible reading, prayer, meditation or even just thoughts about eternity? Very little no doubt. Are all those other things you must accomplish really that important? What will become of those matters after you are dead?

But another source of detrimental weight is the requirements of human religion. Throughout this letter to the Hebrew Christians it is obvious that the writer seeks to combat the intense pressure from Judaizers. They said it was okay to be saved by faith in Christ, but that true salvation came about only by keeping Jewish traditions also. We can also slip into adding that kind of bulky, unnecessary weight.

For example, Bible reading is very important. But I heard about a saint the other day who reads 15 chapters of the Bible every day. It is possible for you to feel pressured that you need to measure up to that human standard, which really is impossible for normal, working people. Or prayer is very important. But it really is impossible for us to spend two hours in prayer everyday and still take care of our responsibilities. It is right for us to gather together as believers to encourage each other and to engage in corporate worship and mutual learning. But attendance at church meetings can become slavish. And worse than these is the constant pressure to do the seven sacraments in order to get to heaven.

We who are running the race are responsible to get rid of these things. Based on God's teaching in the Bible, you must decide what is necessary and what is not. Most peer pressure is not necessary. You are responsible to lay these things aside. No one else is going to do it for you.

Like runners in a race, we also must divest ourselves of entangling sin. We lay aside the weights *and sin which clings so closely.* Much of the time the problem in the race is not too much weight but getting our feet wrapped up in sin. The word *clings* comes from the Greek word that speaks of something that is skillfully surrounding or intertwined.

Sins like lust, greed, jealousy, envy, anger, covetousness, pride, sloth, lying, cheating, stealing, and so on will cause us to stumble in the race. We each are responsible to assess our lives daily to determine if we are getting tangled up in simple, acceptable sins. This

happens more easily than we think. Our whole world is completely sunk in these sins. This stuff is considered normal and acceptable. How long can you watch lust or jealousy portrayed as “normal” on your favorite shows or movies, and not be predisposed toward those sins? You’re getting tangled up. God holds each of us responsible to get untangled so we can run.

As we run the race, we must realize that we each run our individual races. *Let us run with endurance the race that is set before us (v.1c)*. God gives each of us a particular race to run. You are not the only runner. But only **you** can run **your** race. Your race is not my race and my race is not your race. Be careful not to judge your fellow runner by the course God has put you on. While we run in similar ways, and while we all must lay aside weight and sins, we must remember that my race course will be different from yours.

Run your race with endurance. The call for endurance implies that the race will not be easy. God does not require us to be fast or flashy. God requires us to be faithful, constant, patient and steadfast. Keep plodding. In 1981 Bill Broadhurst entered the Pepsi Challenge, a 10,000 meter race in Omaha, Nebraska. Ten years earlier, surgery on a brain aneurysm left Bill’s left side paralyzed. The gun sounded and the runners were off. As the pack quickly disappeared into the horizon, Bill threw his stiff left leg forward with a plop and pivoted on it. Over and over, plop, pivot, plop, pivot, he plodded along. The winner of the race was Bill Rodgers, a famous marathon runner. He finished in about 30 minutes. Bill Broadhurst, on the other hand, continued to plod along, sweating from the intense pain from each step. He finally crossed the finish line two hours and twenty-nine minutes later. Not many were there to cheer his finish, but Bill Rodgers was. He congratulated the man who ran with endurance and then took the metal from his own neck and place it around Bill’s.

Our Focus (v.2).

Jesus is the example of faith. As we run, we must be *looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith (v.2a)*. This verse teaches that Jesus is the pioneer of our faith. The word for *founder* or *author* speaks of the one who takes the lead, or a pioneer. This means that Jesus has already run the race. He ran it perfectly. He knows about

the weight we gather, the sins we get entangled in, and all about enduring when you fell like quitting. Therefore, *we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. (Hebrews 4:15)*.

As Jesus ran His race, His faith was fixed on God the Father. That the Son focused on the Father throughout the race is obvious from His affirmations like, *“I can do nothing on my own. As I hear, I judge, and my judgment is just, because I seek not my own will but the will of him who sent me” (John 5:30)*. Likewise, near the end, in the great temptation to quit, Jesus kept focus on the Father’s will. *And going a little farther he fell on his face and prayed, saying, “My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will” (Matthew 26:39)*.

Because He successfully ran the race before us, Jesus is the completer of our faith. The word *perfecter* is the Greek word *teleioteis* which also means the finisher. This is the only time the word is found in the New Testament, which means that we cannot determine its meaning based on NT use. However, we do know that the word speaks of Jesus taking faith to the highest level possible, bringing it to perfection. It is very interesting to consider that the word Jesus said at the end of His crucifixion (*tetelestai*) was from the same root. At the end of His race Jesus said, *“It has been completed” (John 19:30)*. Whatever level of trust is required as we endure the race, Jesus has already done it.

Furthermore, we look at Jesus while we run because He is the example of joy. We look to Jesus, *who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame (v.2b)*. Jesus endured the cross and despised shame. Running the race to the end required Jesus to endure shame. Even while He was suffering in agony because He trusted the Father implicitly, the sinners mocked Him. *“He trusts in God; let God deliver him now, if he desires him. For he said, ‘I am the Son of God’” (Matthew 27:43)*.

The mockery and resistance did not deter our Savior. He endured with joy. We must admit that having genuine joy while enduring, joy while suffering, is impossible for human wisdom to comprehend. This is a supernatural joy that the Father gives us while we run. At least we should learn that we should run like Jesus,

keeping our focus on the Father who gives joy all the way to the end of the race.

Jesus is also the example of finishing well. Having run the race perfectly, *Jesus is seated at the right hand of the throne of God (v.2c)*. Jesus completed the race. He finished the course the Father set before Him. He ran for the glory of the Father. Then Jesus sat down in heaven. That was the absolute sign that He completed the race. And sitting in heaven, He is interceding for us who are still running.

But before we leave this text we need to consider the truth that is implied in the opening verse by the word “author.” We can only follow Jesus’s example of faith if Jesus is the source of faith. That is why we are *looking to Jesus (v.2a)*. We begin looking to Jesus when we believe in Jesus at salvation.

During Jesus’s ministry, doubters wanted to know how to be saved. *Then they said to him, “What must we do, to be doing the works of God?” Jesus answered them, “This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent” (John 6:28-29)*. If they wanted salvation, they needed to believe in Jesus? That is the same requirement today. But thinking this through, we must wonder, how can spiritually dead people believe? God graciously grants the gift of faith.

That is the answer Paul gave in his letter to the Ephesian believers. *But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ – by grace you have been saved – and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast (Ephesians 2:4-9)*.

God pours out this grace through Christ who ran the race before us. *[God] who saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began (2 Timothy 1:9)*.

That is why we keep our eyes on Jesus as we run. We believe in Jesus to get in the race, and we continue to believe Him as we are becoming like Him during the race. *And we all, with unveiled face,*

beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit (2 Corinthians 3:18).

Run your race. Run it well. Endure through the difficult parts of the race. Endure while you continually cast aside unnecessary weight and sins that entangle. Run keeping your eyes on Jesus because He has already run the race perfectly. He is the initiator and completer of your faith.