

Last week we finished the great chapter on faith. The author shared about the faith of some of the men and women ...who have gone before us, from Abel to the prophets, ³³ *who through faith conquered kingdoms, enforced justice, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions,* ³⁴ *quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, were made strong out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight.* ³⁵ *Women received back their dead by resurrection. Some were tortured, refusing to accept release, so that they might rise again to a better life.* ³⁶ *Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment.* ³⁷ *They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were killed with the sword. They went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, mistreated—* ³⁸ *of whom the world was not worthy...* Hebrews 11:33-38a They died without receiving what was the promised. ⁴⁰ *since God had provided something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect.* Hebrews 11:40 This is God's great plan of building a temple of living stones (1 Peter 2:5), a bride for the Son (Revelation 19:7), a more wonderful temple (Ephesians 2:21), a more complete bride through the faith exhibited in them and in us. Together we are complemented by one another. Just as the cells of the body all serve the whole body, so we live to serve one another in obedience to the head, Christ Jesus (Colossians 1:18).

I want to digress for a moment to explain the importance of our oneness and unity. Paul Brand explains in his book, *In His Likeness*, that the physical body is a picture of the spiritual body of Christ. Every cell lives and dies for all the others. White blood cells will sacrifice themselves to destroy invading bacteria for the sake of the other cells of the body. All cells live for the whole body and obey the head. In some mysterious way that we do not understand, cells communicate with one another and work together for the common good of all. Cancer is a cell mutation that causes a cell to live for itself neglecting all the others, even taking from them. "If each of us can learn to glory in the fact that we matter little except in relation to the Body, and if each will acknowledge the worth in every other member, then perhaps the cells of Christ's Body will begin acting as Christ intended."¹ (See 1 Corinthians 12:7)

The body of Christ includes the saints of old whose faith was counted as righteousness. They trusted in what God would do to save them just as we look back and trust in what God did through Jesus to save us. When we receive the forgiveness of sins and are saved, they are a part of us and we of them. We are new creations (2 Corinthians 5:17), and each new creation is infused with the essence of Jesus. The immune cells in our body recognize invaders because they don't have the same essence, the same DNA. "All living matter is basically alike; a single atom differentiates animal blood from plant chlorophyll. Yet the body senses infinitesimal differences with an unerring scent; it knows its hundred trillion cells by name."² The children of God recognize one another though we are profoundly diverse in culture, race, economic standing, and language. The closing text from last Sunday and the first verse today reminds us that even time can't separate us.

Commented [PW1]: 1 Peter 2:5 (ESV)

⁵ you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

Commented [PW2]: Revelation 19:7 (ESV)

⁷ Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready;

Commented [PW3]: Ephesians 2:21 (ESV)

²¹ in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord.

Commented [PW4]: Colossians 1:18 (ESV)

¹⁸ And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent.

Commented [PW5]: Yancey, Philip; Brand, Paul; Zondervan. In the Likeness of God (p. 59). Zondervan. Kindle Edition.

¹ To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.

Commented [PW6]: 1 Corinthians 12:7 (ESV)

⁷ To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.

Commented [PW7]: 2 Corinthians 5:17 (ESV)

¹⁷ Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.

Commented [PW8]: Yancey, Philip; Brand, Paul; Zondervan. In the Likeness of God (p. 61). Zondervan. Kindle Edition.

¹ Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, Hebrews 12:1 The text today opens with our connection with all these who have gone before. I would add Jesus' apostles, and people of faith from the time of Jesus to today. That includes about twenty believers who have joined the heavenly cloud of witnesses from this church since I have been pastoring here. And one day, before too long, we will join them on that side, yet we will still be one with those who remain. They aren't somewhere out in outer space; we are surrounded by them. I'm not talking about ghosts, but somehow, perhaps other dimensionally, they are all around us. We depart this plane to be with the Lord and yet the Lord is in every believer (John 14:23)!

Barbara Lewis went home to the Lord a few weeks ago. We tend to think of the separation, but really, we are more with her now than when she was in her earthly home. We can't speak with her, nor should we try to, but she is no longer separated from us by distance. I'm closer to my mom now than I ever was before. If your loved one was in Christ, they are closer to you now than when they were in this realm. Isn't that how this verse begins, telling us we are surrounded by them?

The word "Witnesses" is the Greek word from which we get our word **martyr**. It means **those who took on that new nature with Christ in them showing the world Jesus through their life** (Acts 1:8). Now before you get under condemnation thinking you don't do that so well, let me remind you that the Scriptures tell us the outward working of that inward change is a process that is concluded when we see Jesus face to face (1 John 3:2). We are all works in progress, and there should be progress.

Recognizing that the heroes of faith are all around us, *let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us*, Let us do as they did and lay aside every weight. The author envisioned a Greek arena where the Greek runners ran naked so as not to be encumbered by their togas. Thank God for spandex. The spectators are those in the stand, the witnesses that surround them, watching them run their race. What weight keeps you from running all out? Is it something you fear, or something you don't want to give up? We should examine our hearts to see if anything is holding us back from giving our all.

A week ago, in our men's group, our book asked the question, "What do you want to accomplish before you pass and what is holding you back from accomplishing it?" What holds you back from running all out for Jesus? Some weights we might consider are fear of rejection, financial fears, a sin we have been refusing to give up, concerns for security, love of comfort, and we could go on and on. Each of us has to identify our own weights. Then with determination and the help of the Holy Spirit we have to lay them aside. **Let go of those sins which cling so closely. Disconnect from them and RUN!** The Apostle Paul told us in his letter to run so as to win the prize (1 Corinthians 9:24). That means to run all out, with everything within you. The lines on the track that make up your lane are the directions of the Holy Spirit and the Word of God (1 Corinthians 9:27). Don't be disqualified.

Commented [PW9]: John 14:23 (ESV)

²³ Jesus answered him, "If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him."

Commented [PW10]: Acts 1:8 (ESV)

⁸ But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."

Commented [PW11]: 1 John 3:2 (ESV)

² Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is.

Commented [PW12]: 1 Corinthians 9:24 (ESV)

²⁴ Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it.

Commented [PW13]: 1 Corinthians 9:27 (ESV)

²⁷ But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified.

Our verse in Hebrews says to run with endurance. That was the problem in this church of Hebrews. They had run to this point but now they wanted off the track. The last few laps are the hardest. And all of our older members say, "Amen!" Weakness or illness, hard of hearing, difficulty in remembering, all contribute to the difficulty of the final laps. But the author tells us to endure. The winner of this marathon is the one who keeps running and refuses to be slowed down by the aches and pains from the long race. Our best years are our final laps because by then we have so much experience to share, both our good lessons and those from our mistakes or failures. Hopefully we've learned to discern the voice of the Holy Spirit and now speak wisdom when we share with others. Our culture looks down on the last years, but that is because the world's values are increasingly upside down (Proverbs 16:31).

The next verse tells us how to endure. ² *looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.* Hebrews 12:2 Marathon runners keep their eyes on the distant goal. Our goal is Jesus! We look to Him for strength, for instruction, and as our perfect example. Turn your eyes upon Jesus and the little hill before you will be put in perspective. If you think that hill before you is a mountain, keep looking at Jesus and how He endured the cross and all that His sacrifice accomplished. Keep looking there and your mountain will begin to shrink (Matthew 21:21).

We look to Him because He is the founder and perfecter of our faith. He is the One who started us down this road of faith. He is the One who will finish the work He began in us (Philippians 1:6). And when it doesn't seem like you can go on, first make sure you have thrown aside all those weights. Then make sure your eyes are on Jesus. Then keep throwing one foot in front of the other remembering *He* is the perfecter of your faith (1 Thessalonians 5:24).

When we look to Jesus what do we see? We see Him "who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame..." He is our greatest example of faith. Scourged to near death, nailed to a cross in such a way as to make every breath sheer agony, and yet He hung on to life till His mission was complete (John 19:30). He blessed His persecutors with forgiveness (Luke 23:34). He welcomed a soul into the kingdom (Luke 23:43). He cared for His mother (John 19:26). He endured the weight of the sins of the world until He knew He had accomplished His Father's will. That is our example. How can we complain when we fix our eyes on that example?

The text tells us one reason He endured. It was for the joy that was set before Him. Now, there are a number of ideas as to what that means, but I believe it has to do with the context, the completion of the body, the bride, the temple of the living God. His joy was to see you and me redeemed and transformed, to see the Holy Spirit poured out (Acts 2:33). It was seeing the will of the Father done on earth (Matthew 6:10). It was to turn this ungodly world into Esther's beauty treatments for the saints. Remember how Esther had a year of beauty treatments and training before she met the king (Esther 2:12)? Our beauty treatments come through trials to help us demonstrate the

Commented [PW14]: Proverbs 16:31 (ESV)

³¹ Gray hair is a crown of glory; it is gained in a righteous life.

Commented [PW15]: Matthew 21:21 (ESV)

²¹ And Jesus answered them, "Truly, I say to you, if you have faith and do not doubt, you will not only do what has been done to the fig tree, but even if you say to this mountain, 'Be taken up and thrown into the sea,' it will happen.

Commented [PW16]: Philippians 1:6 (ESV)

⁶ And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.

Commented [PW17]: 1 Thessalonians 5:24 (ESV)

²⁴ He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it.

Commented [PW18]: John 19:30 (ESV)

³⁰ When Jesus had received the sour wine, he said, "It is finished," and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

Commented [PW19]: Luke 23:34 (ESV)

³⁴ And Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." And they cast lots to divide his garments.

Commented [PW20]: Luke 23:43 (ESV)

⁴³ And he said to him, "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise."

Commented [PW21]: John 19:26 (ESV)

²⁶ When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, "Woman, behold, your son!"

Commented [PW22]: Acts 2:33 (ESV)

³³ Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing.

Commented [PW23]: Matthew 6:10 (ESV)

¹⁰ Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

Commented [PW24]: Esther 2:12 (ESV)

¹² Now when the turn came for each young woman to go in to King Ahasuerus, after being twelve months under the regulations for the women, since this was the regular period of their beautifying, six months with oil of myrrh and six months with spices and ointments for women—

fruits of the Spirit, love and holiness. Seeing that in us is the joy set before Jesus, like the psalmist described the sun, rejoicing as a bridegroom coming out of His chamber (Psalm 19:5). That is Jesus the Son coming out of the tomb knowing that before long He will receive His bride.

Now Jesus is back at the right hand of the throne of God. That is the place of all power and authority. That is where He directs the events of this world that will end in the bride being complete and this world being judged. Then He will set up His kingdom where righteousness will reign. His bride will be at His side, perfected, completed.

³ Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted. Hebrews 12:3 Consider, that suggests we look into the ministry of Jesus and see what He endured. From the time His ministry began in Nazareth His own neighbors wanted to kill Him for speaking the truth about their hard hearts and arrogant ways (Luke 4:29). When He healed the sick the people complained that He shouldn't do so on the Sabbath (Luke 13:14). The Pharisees sent spies to listen to His every word to try to accuse and Him or even trick Him into saying something by which they could accuse Him (Mark 12:13). Years on the road with His disciples who witnessed countless miracles and yet they argued about who was the greatest among them (Mark 9:34), and only one of them would say Jesus is the Son of the living God (Matthew 16:16). When He raised a man from the dead the religious leaders didn't run to give Him their allegiance, instead they plotted how they could kill Him (John 11:53). Even His family thought He lost His mind (John 7:5; Mark 3:21). And when it came down to the final hours, the men He trained for three years deserted Him, Peter even cursing and denying he knew Him (Mark 14:71).

Consider that. Think on it, so that you don't blow your own trials out of proportion. The church of Hebrews had recovered from the first persecution and done quite well. Now they feared that harder times were coming. So the author told them to look on Jesus and think about what He went through. Then look at the cross and what He suffered for us to become His bride. Then he shames them and us by putting it all in perspective. *⁴ In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood.* Hebrews 12:4

We struggle against sin in our own life, but then we also struggle from sins of worldly people who hate Jesus and His followers because we stand for everything they hate. But we haven't yet shed a drop of our blood. Jesus poured out His life blood that we might be His, but we are afraid of losing some of this world's things which we have come to enjoy. We are afraid of being shamed by our community. How can we worry about those trivial things after all Jesus suffered for us? How can we have that fear when people in Syria and other countries have lost family members who would not deny their faith in Jesus? When one member of the body suffers, all the other members suffer with it, wrote the Apostle Paul (1 Corinthians 12:26). Are we feeling their pain? Do we truly care for them? Praying for them will help us put our own trials in perspective.

Commented [PW25]: Psalm 19:5 (ESV)

⁵ which comes out like a bridegroom leaving his chamber, and, like a strong man, runs its course with joy.

Commented [PW26]: Luke 4:29 (ESV)

²⁹ And they rose up and drove him out of the town and brought him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built, so that they could throw him down the cliff.

Commented [PW27]: Luke 13:14 (ESV)

¹⁴ But the ruler of the synagogue, indignant because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath, said to the people, "There are six days in which work ought to be done. Come on those days and be healed, and not on the Sabbath day."

Commented [PW28]: Mark 12:13 (ESV)

¹³ And they sent to him some of the Pharisees and some of the Herodians, to trap him in his talk.

Commented [PW29]: Mark 9:34 (ESV)

³⁴ But they kept silent, for on the way they had argued with one another about who was the greatest.

Commented [PW30]: Matthew 16:16 (KJV)

¹⁶ And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.

Commented [PW31]: John 11:53 (KJV)

⁵³ Then from that day forth they took counsel together for to put him to death.

Commented [PW32]: John 7:5 (ESV)

⁵ For not even his brothers believed in him.

Commented [PW33]: Mark 3:21 (ESV)

²¹ And when his family heard it, they went out to seize him, for they were saying, "He is out of his mind."

Commented [PW34]: Mark 14:71 (ESV)

⁷¹ But he began to invoke a curse on himself and to swear, "I do not know this man of whom you speak."

Commented [PW35]: 1 Corinthians 12:26 (ESV)

²⁶ If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together.

Last week the church at large remembered the suffering part of the body of Christ. Again, it seems this passage comes at just the right time to remind us that there are more important things than prosperity and physical comfort. We get through what God allows to come our way by His grace and the help of brothers and sisters in Christ, His body (Hebrews 10:24-25).

Our few verses today have spoken volumes and shown us how to complete our lives in the best possible way. First, we should understand that we are a part of the body of Christ that is not limited to our day. We are surrounded by these heroes of faith. Next we must realize we need to get rid of any weight or sin that is holding us back from running all out to win the prize of the high calling of God in Christ. We must run with patient endurance as we look to Jesus and the example He set. When we think it is too tough, think about what He endured. Finally remember the joy that is set before us. We are on our way to a wedding feast as the bride (Revelation 19:9). What could be better than being united with Jesus? This is indeed a mindset that is very different from the world around us. We must recognize the world will never understand us and will persecute us (2 Timothy 3:12). Keep your eyes on Jesus and the joy set before us.

I'd like for us to remember one more thing. We are one with that great cloud of witnesses. We are one with our brothers and sisters being persecuted around the world today. Like the cells of a body we are here for one another. When the Apostle Paul describes the body of Christ and the gifts of the Spirit, he tells us all the gifts are for the building up of the whole body (1 Corinthians 12:7). Like the cells in our body, we are here for one another, not for ourselves. Paul Brand writes that in this new identity as a part of Jesus' body, "My sense of competition fades. No longer do I have to bristle against life, seizing ways to prove myself. In my new identity my ideal has become to live my life in such a way that people around me recognize Jesus Christ and his love, not my own set of distinctive qualities. My worth and acceptance are enveloped in him. I have found this process of renunciation and commitment to be healthy, relaxing, and wholly good."⁴ Doctor Brand ran the race with endurance as He looked unto Jesus and the joy that was set before Him. He threw off the weight of vain glory and pride and ran all out for the others who make up the body of Christ. This passage asks us to follow the examples of those who have gone before us, especially that of our Savior and Lord, Christ Jesus. Let's give those in the grandstands something to yell about!

Questions

- 1 Review the verses closing out chapter 11.
- 2 What do healthy cells do? Cancer cells?
- 3 What holds you back from running all out for Jesus?
- 4 How can we endure?
- 5 What was Jesus' example?
- 6 How can we complain when we fix our eyes on that example?
- 7 What was the joy set before Jesus?
- 8 What is the joy set before us?
- 9 What expression may have shamed the Hebrews?
- 10 How did the last quote challenge you?

Commented [PW36]: Hebrews 10:24-25 (ESV)

²⁴ And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works,
²⁵ not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.

Commented [PW37]: Revelation 19:9 (ESV)

⁹ And the angel said to me, "Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb." And he said to me, "These are the true words of God."

Commented [PW38]: 2 Timothy 3:12 (ESV)

¹² Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted,

Commented [PW39]: 1 Corinthians 12:7 (ESV)

⁷ To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.

Commented [PW40]: Yancey, Philip; Brand, Paul; Zondervan. In the Likeness of God (p. 65-66). Zondervan. Kindle Edition.