

We have just finished with the hall of faith chapter in Hebrews. And we are not just left with incredible stories of faith.

- But what is going to occur now is the movement from the examples of other people's faith **to a call of our own**. This is the practical application with a large dose of encouragement and instruction.
- And because of the importance here, we're only going to cover most of the first two verses today. So let's read them and then pull out the many pieces contained within.

Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a 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, ² looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith...

I like the first three words of this transition—*"Therefore we also..."*—because it's saying to us that just as these individuals listed in **Ch. 11** walked in faith (although not perfectly), we can too. And as I've mentioned previously, **I believe many followers of Jesus want to live more of a miraculous and power-filled life but somehow think that's not on the menu anymore**. As a matter of fact, **1** there are Christian groups (theological camps) who believe the miraculous works of the Holy Spirit in the believer's life are no longer possible. They are called **cessationists**. **2** Then there is another camp that believes that as followers of Jesus we should always be healed, delivered, and prospering in the worldly pursuits. But both groups miss the clear teaching of the Bible.

- As we saw in the last part of **Ch. 11**, **1** there are times faith leads to God delivering His people miraculously, **2** times when God's people go through the fire of persecution with God by their side, delivering them into heaven, and **3** times when His people have to run for their lives. And I'm so grateful all are listed for their **faith**, even though their outcomes were different. Because their faith was not!
- And **we also** have been called to walk in this faith. So if we say that faith is only real when we get delivered, that's not Biblical. Or if we say that miracles do not happen anymore, that's also not Biblical.
- Faith is trusting we are to follow the instructions of God to pray, believing He hears and will always do what is right, accepting His answer regardless of what it might be.

Are you ready to do that—to add more faith to your walk with Jesus? I can say that to everyone because there is always room to acquire deeper faith. And that is what he is calling us to here.

Next, we come to something which I believe many have questions or thoughts about. And that's if those who have died before us and gone to heaven can see (or watch) us. And it's this very verse which people use when building their beliefs on this matter.

- So let me ask you a question; if you could live anywhere on the earth that you might picture as paradise, where war, sirens, poverty, and business are all done away with, would it still be paradise if you had to watch the evening news?
- Folks, **when I get to be with Jesus**, to enter into His rest, my focus is going to be in one place and it's not down here—**He has that covered!** What this is referring to, in my opinion (based on the text), when speaking about these witnesses, **is not that they are witnessing what we are doing** (thank the Lord, because they would be seriously disturbed 😊). Look at the text again, *"Since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses"*. There is no mention of them watching or seeing us as some want to suppose.
- When we just went to El Salvador for our mission trip, we went out **witnessing**. That's us going to tell others of what Jesus has done. It's not to spy on them! So what we have here is their lives are witness to us in that they lived them in faith! And now it's our turn to be inspired, motivated, and on the move.

Now, just in case that bums you out that your peeps are not watching, I have some good news. **1)** The first piece is that your relatives have no clue of the ridiculous (and sometimes foolish) things you have done since their going home to be with Jesus. If you think about it, that should bring you great comfort. 😊 **2)** But the Bible does tell us the angels are watching and are amazed by God's grace ([Matt. 18:10](#), [1 Pet. 1:10-12](#)). So even your messy life is bringing God glory. **3)** But the most important piece is there is someone watching ([Psa. 139:1-6](#), [Heb. 4:13](#)) and completely involved in your life ([Matt. 10:29-31](#)). And He has promised to be with you every step of the way until He gets you all the way home ([Heb. 13:5](#)).

I'm not too sure that if any of my believing ancestors could see me from heaven that they could do anything to help me other than petition God to intervene. **But I don't need that, because God is already watching and intervening.** So don't sweat this. You will see those who have gone on before you in Jesus soon enough. Until then (and forever), God's got the watch.

And now comes a powerful set of instructions for us from the latter part of [verse 1](#) that are worth repeating, saying, *"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"* (also translated 'marked out for us').

- As we read through [Heb. 11](#), we heard about the course each person listed there was set on by the Lord. **Abraham** didn't decide he would be the father of many nations; God did. **Deborah** didn't decide she would be a judge and a prophetess; God did. **Gideon** didn't decide to be used to deliver the nation; God did. **Sampson** didn't decide to work out daily to be the strongest man alive; God made him that way. **Elijah** didn't decide he wanted to be a prophet; God did that. **Rahab** didn't decide she wanted to be in the lineage of Jesus; that was God's doing.
- You see, the course or race you are to run is the one God has *set before* you. **I have heard so many comparing themselves by someone else's course that God set before that person and not themselves.** And doing so has caused far too many to declare defeat. If you're not designed by God to be a public speaker, do you think He planned for you to be a preacher? If you don't like children particularly, do you think He has called you to be a regular Sunday School teacher? If you hate numbers, do you think God desires you to be the church treasurer?
- I think we do this far too often, where we compare our calling with the calling of others. And the enemy and culture love to use their voices to discourage us, saying things like being a mother is missing your potential. But I think of a woman like **Susanna Wesley**. She didn't travel the world building orphanages, libraries, witnessing to the lost, or preaching to the world. No, she was a dedicated mother of 19 kids (nine of who died—as was common in that day [1669-1742]). She homeschooled her kids and raised them with love, intention, and would meet with each child one-on-one during the week to have conversations about their relationships with God. **And with that act of faithfulness to her course, two of her sons** (John and Charles Wesley) **impacted the world for Jesus**. She has been called the mother of the Methodist church (back when they were all serving Jesus). **What would have happened if she hadn't run the course God had for her because she was comparing herself to someone else's course?**

And I, for one, find it interesting that the word *"race"* can also be translated "conflict" or "struggle," because it's not always a cakewalk. That's why I believe we are also told here that we're to *run* this race and not given instructions to just simply be spectators or lollygagging participants. **There is a sense of urgency and intentionality given to how we are to approach the course that Jesus has laid out for us.** Paul made this clear in [1 Cor. 9:24](#), saying, *"Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it."* And knowing each one of us has our own course, this is not intended to be a competition with each other, but rather a calling to run our course with passion and purpose!

- But I'm afraid there are far too many believers who refuse to take the track. They are lounging around in their proverbial bathrobe and slippers, eating cocoa puffs. Not only is that not a breakfast of champions, it's the attitude of not being interested in being victorious in what God has set before you.
- Then some will say, "Well back in such and such a time, I...". As if somehow, they ran their race back then and completed it. So now they are just waiting to die. That's not Biblical, because **your course is not done until you cross the finish line.** And folks, **that finish line is not on earth.**
- There have been people who were serving Jesus and lost bodily function from sickness, injury, persecution...do you think their race ended then? Not a chance. Their course might appear to have been disrupted, but even that is not reality, because God sees the beginning through to the end. He knows what is coming before you were born. And as a child of His, He has been working out a course uniquely designed for you, using every experience in your life as a pathway to victory and eternal reward.

Folks, every one of us has some powerful events that take place in our lives. You can choose to use those as excuses as to why you stopped running, **or you can choose to let them motivate you to run more intently.**

What are you currently choosing?

- Are you running a smaller course, a parallel but wrong course, a backwards course, trying to run someone else's course... There is no way to know that but to meet with the coach (that's God) and get instruction from Him. You could still be running a leg of a course He had you on before, when you were supposed to pass the baton. Not so you could sit down, but rather to run the next section He has for you.
- You might say, "But I'm tired." Tell that to Abraham and Sarah who had a child at around 100 😊, **and then exercise some faith.** You can and will rest forever in heaven. God will let you catch your breath at times, but this race is still on, unless you forfeit.
- Paul would say to the Galatians, *"You ran well. Who hindered you from obeying the truth?"* (Gal. 5:7) I think about all those who will train for the majority of their lives for the honor of representing their nation at a sporting event. Folks, it's time to run for the King of Kings.

And we should note that he provides two specific things we need to let go of, or cut free from our lives, in order to be able to run without hinderance, saying, *"Let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us."* Let's deal with these one at a time, beginning with the things that weigh us down but are not categorically sin.

- In 1 Cor. 6:12-13a it's also Paul who says, *"All things are lawful for me, but all things are not helpful. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any. Foods for the stomach and the stomach for foods, but God will destroy both it and them."* I'm not going to try to go through an exhaustive list of every one of these permissible things that we can turn into a weight, because we can do this with everything. So let's stick with food (even though the picture of food is more than just food, but rather of all natural things God has created for us). Rom. 14:17 tells us, *"The kingdom of God is not eating and drinking* (for the Father knows we have need of such things [Matt. 6:32] and supplies [Phil. 4:19]), *but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit."* Yet how many have let food become that which bogs us down or captures so much of our thoughts and time that we have little left over for the course God has set before us? It could be obsessing about the abundance of food, the availability of food, the nonstop craving for food, the perfection of cooking foods...

- Just how much of your daily life is focused on food? Is it one of the things keeping you from running for the Lord? Is it occupying more time than the time you allot to be with the Lord or to serve Him? At the same time, we are not to loathe the fact we need to eat, for it and our ability to enjoy it both come from God. He gave spices, taste buds, flavors, aroma...it's a gift from Him to us. But food and drink cannot give you real and lasting peace or joy. That comes only from God. And eating fruit cannot make you fruitful. That happens from pushing away from the table, after the meal, to run the course set before you.
- We can turn a blessing into a weight. And I'm afraid we are kind of good at it. Work, hobbies, sports, finances, vacations, homes, education, fitness, children, fashion, pets...I know I just stepped on some sacred cows here, and I intended to. Because although each of these are blessings God has made possible, if you let them, they can become your excuse or motivation for not running the course God has set before you. I know this to be true because I've heard it so many times.

What has hindered you from running? And don't blame someone else. Because whatever circumstance you are in, God has given you the ability to run the course He has set before you, by faith.

The second thing he mentions we are to break free from in order to run, is *the sin which so easily ensnares us*. This is speaking of the little sins that might be culturally acceptable or even be more of everyday things. Folks, I don't think I need to go into too much depth here. We all know that we are progressive by nature. Therefore, every chink in the armor of God you allow is a future potential catastrophe. Or at the least, a weight to carry. Because when we sin even a little, we have just given the enemy something to work with. And one of His favorite tools is shame.

- Now don't get me wrong, sometimes we should be ashamed of our performance, behavior, or thoughts. But that shame should lead us to repentance, the grace of God, and then back out on the track. But history (sometimes even our very own) shows us that the enemy can use that shame to move the narrative from us making a mistake to us being a mistake. And when that lie is believed, some can suppose there is no reason to keep running or finish the race.
- Folks, God is not calling for perfection, but for participation and process. Just like professional runners, work on the piece the coach tells you to focus on now, until he gives you the next thing to refine. With each piece you are going to run faster or farther.

And as we close, we are just going to touch one aspect of [verse 2](#) before returning here next week. When I was a professional coach, I would try to find videos of athletes who performed a particular move perfectly so I could watch it over and over again with my athletes. Frame by frame, over and over. And we would even get videos on all the strength and flexibility training of certain athletes to examine the physical preparations they would take, making it possible for them to be able to execute certain skills. And we were watching imperfect people.

- But in the race we've been called to run, we do have the perfect example. And through the gift of the Bible, we can examine His life over and over. And because it's the Living Word, we will not just come away with strong reinforcement of what we already do know, there is always going to be a little more added to our knowledge and faith.
- But He's offering us even more. Picture yourself as a junior high track athlete and your father as the word record holder in your event. And he is standing at the finish line calling you to run to him, cheering you on, calling you to cross the line into his arms. He is not comparing you to the other runners, or even caring about what place you come in. He just wants you to run your course keeping your eyes fixed on him.

- Folks, your course has a finish line. And the Father is saying to YOU, *Look unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith...* He is there waiting for you and me. And He's calling us to run for the prize. **Because He's the prize.** Folks, it's time to run!

CROSS REFERENCES

Mat 18:10 NKJV "Take heed that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I say to you that in heaven their angels always see the face of My Father who is in heaven."

1Pe 1:10–12 NKJV (10) Of this salvation the prophets have inquired and searched carefully, who prophesied of the grace [that would come] to you, (11) searching what, or what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ who was in them was indicating when He testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. (12) To them it was revealed that, not to themselves, but to us they were ministering the things which now have been reported to you through those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven--things which angels desire to look into.

Psa 139:1–6 NKJV (1) For the Chief Musician. A Psalm of David. O LORD, You have searched me and known [me]. (2) You know my sitting down and my rising up; You understand my thought afar off. (3) You comprehend my path and my lying down, And are acquainted with all my ways. (4) For [there is] not a word on my tongue, [But] behold, O LORD, You know it altogether. (5) You have hedged me behind and before, And laid Your hand upon me. (6) [Such] knowledge [is] too wonderful for me; It is high, I cannot [attain] it.

Heb 4:13 NKJV And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things [are] naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we [must give] account.

Mat 10:29–31 NKJV (29) "Are not two sparrows sold for a copper coin? And not one of them falls to the ground apart from your Father's will. (30) But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. (31) Do not fear therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows."

Heb 13:5 NKJV [Let your] conduct [be] without covetousness; [be] content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you."

Mat 6:32 NKJV "For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things."

Phl 4:19 NKJV And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.