

Hello everyone, hope you had a good week. Hard to believe it is the end of summer already. School starts for Faith Tuesday. Have a super week! Hope to see you next Sunday! God bless you all!

Pastor Don

“Learning from our Elders” Hebrews 11:30-12:2 August 18, 2013

After hearing his father preach many sermons on justification, sanctification and many other words that ended in “ation”; 10 year old little Johnny was ready when the Sunday school teacher asked if anybody knew what procrastination meant. He said I’m not sure what it means teacher, but I know our church believes in it.

Did you see the 400 pound man wearing the t-shirt that said “I conquered my anorexia”?

By perseverance, the snail made it to the ark. Helen Keller once said we can do anything we want as long as we stick to it long enough.

The word persevere is a compound word. The pre fix per means through. The root word severe means serious, harsh, and intense. Persevere means to keep going through the trouble. We can only do this by faith in God. We must keep trusting him, focusing on him, and obeying him as he leads us through our severe circumstances. Perseverance is getting up one more time than you are knocked down. Perseverance is always striving to do your best, forgetting about the past and striving on towards the future.

In the 1987 world indoor track championships, Irishman Eamon Coughlan, the then world record holder for 1500 meters, lost in the qualifying race. He tripped and fell, but he got up and was back in 3rd place, good enough to qualify with 20 yards to go. He looked over his shoulder to see if anybody was catching him. He looked over the wrong shoulder as he was pased on the other side and finished 4th. We only finish well in the race of life when we do not take our eyes off the goal; Jesus Christ.

Perseverance pays off. WE must focus on Jesus in order to persevere in the race of life.

What is our goal this morning? What is our focus? Are we running life's race with determination and perseverance? Do we learn from our mistakes? Do we follow the good examples that have been set for us? Are we good examples of faith & perseverance? Pray

The faith chapter continues to tell us of Israel's heroes of faith. Last week we read v.1-16, today we started with v.30, the 13 verses we skipped tell us of Abraham's faith; "when he was tested, he offered up Isaac", "concluding that God *was* able to raise *him* up, even from the dead". These 13 vs. also tell us of the faith of Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses and Moses' parents.

In verse 29 the author reminds us of the great escape from Egyptian slavery. After God sent 10 plagues upon Egypt, the last of which being the death of the 1st born, the Israelites were free to leave Egypt. It was with this plague that the Jews began their Passover celebration. But Pharaoh changed his mind and pursued the Israelites. They came to the Red Sea and it looked like the Hebrews were trapped, but God performed another miracle; He parted the Red Sea & the Hebrews crossed as if it were dry ground. The water was divided and became a high wall on both sides of the Hebrews as they walked on dry ground to the other side of the sea. The Egyptian army tried to follow, but the sea receded back to its oneness as the walls of water collapsed and drowned the entire Egyptian army.

Now after these great miracles, and especially the parting of the Red Sea, you'd think the Hebrews would fully trust God and be ready to obey, but they were not. They balked at the idea of entering the Promised Land, and this lack of faith cost them their lives.

40 years past between verses 29 and 30. Everyone over 20, except Joshua and Caleb died in the wilderness because of their unbelief, because of their lack of faith. That is what unbelief is, a lack of faith. Do we have faith this morning or unbelief?

Finally after 40 years of wondering in disobedience, God parted the Jordan River & lead them into the Promised Land. Jericho was the first city God delivered into their hands. What a miracle the conquering of this city was. They did not attack it in a conventional manner. They marched around it once a day for 6 days, then on the 7th day, they marched around it 7 times. On the 7th time the priests blew trumpets & the people shouted, then the walls fell down flat. They killed everyone in the city except Rahab and her family. She believed in the God of Israel. She hid the spies that Joshua sent into the city. Her faith was rewarded by the sparing of her life and the lives of her parents and siblings. Then she became an Israelite, married, gave birth and is listed in the genealogy of Jesus Christ.

The faith of any nation is the faith of its people. The author mentions several famous people of faith. Gideon, Barak, Samson, and Jephthah were all judges God raised up to lead the nation and defeat her enemies. Samuel was the last judge of Israel and its first prophet. He anointed the first

2 kings of Israel, Saul and David. David not only was Israel's greatest king, he is described as a man after God's own heart. What are we after? Do we persevere in our faith like Joshua and the prophets?

These faithful people subdued kingdoms, worked righteousness, and obtained promises through their faith. Faith stops the mouths of lions, like it did for Daniel; quenches the fiery furnace like it did for Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego. Faith enables us to escape the sword like Mordicai and the Jewish race. Faith is simply holding onto the Hand of God, who can blunt any sword and turn it away from us. Faith makes the weak strong. Philippians 4:13 says "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."

Faith makes us valiant in battle and makes the attacking armies of our enemies flee.

V 35 tells us that faithful women have received their dead loves back alive again. In

1 Kings 17:17-24 Elijah raised the widow's son from the dead. In 2kings 4:32-37 Elisha raised the Shunammite woman's son from the dead. Jesus himself resurrected Lazarus, and the son of the widow of Nain. Do we believe that Jesus is the resurrection and the life and those that believe in Him never truly die; they just move from this life to heaven to live with Him forever?

Some died for their faith. They were tortured to death because they would not recant their faith. They would not deny their God. Would we?

Some people of faith were publicly mocked and scourged. Some were thrown into prison. Both Jeremiah and Joseph spent time in prison, as did the Apostle Paul.

Many believers died for their faith. Zechariah was stoned. Isaiah was sawed in half. Under Saul's command 85 priests died by the sword. Many were burned alive.

Still others were forced to wander about in sheep or goat skins, living in caves and being destitute, afflicted and tormented. The world was not worthy of these great people of faith. Their faith gave them a good testimony. Do we have a good testimony?

The Christian life is not easy. It is filled with trials and temptations. Loving God and living for Him does not guarantee us a carefree life. Faith does not guarantee earthly success. It does guarantee that we will please God. Remember vs. 6 says that without faith it is impossible to please God. Faith forms our values and helps us to make right choices. Is our faith pleasing to God?

Faith helps us to overcome the trials and tribulations that life throws at us. Faith reminds us that we are not in them alone. God is with us. Jesus said I will never leave you nor forsake you. We may never see the purpose for our troubles or our suffering, but by faith we know that God is

with us and it will all work out for his glory. Romans 8:28 says “For we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.” Faith tells us that no matter what happens, God is with us. Do we believe that God is always with us? Do we trust him? Are we faithful to Him?

These very faithful Old Testament believers had a great testimony, but they did not receive the full promise. The Messiah did not come in their life times. He was in the future. The believers to which this book was written, and to Christians today, the Messiah has come. We look back to the cross; the faithful mentioned here in the faith hall of fame looked forward to it. Christ’s death was the atonement for every believer, past present and future. It opened the door to heaven for all who believe. We will all be made perfect together. We will all be in heaven together. We will all be made complete in Christ Jesus.

Christians are not just one with other Christians; we are one with every believer; those before the flood, those after the flood, those under the Law, those since the Law, together, we make up the one true Church, the bride of Christ with Jesus as the head of the church. Old and New Testament believers will be glorified together. Ephesians 4:4-6 “There is 1 body and 1 spirit, just as you were called in 1 hope of your calling; 1 Lord, 1 faith, 1 baptism; 1 God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all and in you all.” All believers are to be unified because we are all on the same team running the same race, surrounded by the same witnesses. This great cloud of witnesses are the people mentioned in chapter 11. They are witnesses testifying to the truth of faith.

Are we good witness to the truth of faith or are we weighed down in our faith? The weight referred to here is anything that hinders our walk with God. Not just sin; notice sin gets its own line. We need to lay aside everything that besets and ensnares us. These are not all sin. We each have 3 things that could be weights upon us as we run the race that is set before us. 1st, our friends could be weights that we need to lay aside. Not all our friends are good for our Christian walk. They influence us; is their influence good or bad? Do we influence our friends for Jesus? 2^{ndly}, our jobs could hinder our walk with Christ; bad hours, bad environment, wrong attitude, do we need a new job? Are we good witnesses at work? Lastly our hobbies could weight us down if they become an idol to us. So, have we laid aside every weight? Are we free to run the race set before us with faith and endurance? It takes faith to persevere in the race that is life. All these people that we have talked about so far persevered by faith. Are we persevering by faith?

Looking unto Jesus means that we fix our eyes upon Him and never look away. He must be our focus. The only way to persevere by faith is to always be focused on Jesus. He is the author and finisher of our faith. It revolves around him. Jesus is the author of Christianity because He started it. It is all about Him, he is the object of it. Christianity is not a religion; it is a relationship with Jesus. Do we have a relationship with Jesus today?

He is the finisher of it. He said it is finished. What is finished? God's plan for the salvation of mankind. Jesus had fulfilled every prophecy and every command of God. He finished his race also. He has done everything necessary for us to live by faith. He did his part. He lived the perfect life. He died for our sins. He was resurrected and is now preparing a place for us in heaven with him. His part is finished, ours is just beginning. It is our turn to run the race of life by faith.

Jesus endured the cross and all of its suffering and humiliation because of his love for both God and us. He knew the joy that awaited him on the other side of the cross. The same joy that awaited Jesus, also awaited Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Sarah, Enoch, Able, Joshua and Rahab. It also awaits us as well. All we have to do is run our race faithfully. We do that like any good runner, with our eyes fixed on the finish line. Jesus is the finish line. He is the focus of our race; is he the focus of our lives? What are we focused on today?

God always helps His faithful believers; what He calls us to do, He will equip us to do. He has given us 3 tools to be used in our race of faith. 1st, he has given us the ability and the opportunity to gather together in public worship. Hebrews 10:25 tells us not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together. There is strength in numbers. Gathering together with fellow believers encourages us all to keep the faith and stay the course. It helps us to stay focused upon the face of Jesus. It feeds our faith because we realize that we are not the only one running this race of faith.

The 2nd tool God has given us is His word. Reading the Bible every day strengthens our faith. Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God. 2 Timothy 2:15 tells us to study to show ourselves approved unto God, a workman that needs not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. How is our personal bible study coming along? We each need to spend time in God's word everyday. How can you have a relationship with someone if you never talk to them? He talks to us through his word; we talk to him thru prayer. How is our prayer lives today? Prayer is our 3rd tool.

James 5:16 tells us that the effective, fervent prayer of a righteous person avails much.

We can't run the race of faith without a good prayer life. Paul tells us to pray without ceasing; to pray about all things; to be anxious for nothing but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God. God loves to hear from his children, have we talked to our heavenly father today?

The only way to win this race of faith is to remain faithful no matter what. To persevere by faith is hard work. We might have to leave our families and our homes; we might have to do a job that people will ridicule us for. We might be told to do some things in an unusual manner. We might have to wait a long time to see the results of our faith; we may never see those results in this lifetime. But if we stay focused upon Jesus; if we never doubt him or deny him, we too will receive the joy set before us; an eternal home whose builder and maker is God. So let us

persevere brothers and sisters; let us finish our course faithfully. Let us conquer the land and be a faithful example of Christ at all times. [Pray]