

Looking Unto Jesus (Part 1)

Hebrews 12: 1-3

We are celebrating the Memorial Day weekend. Tomorrow is the official observance, but for many the weekend is also a time of celebration. This is the time that unofficially marks the beginning of summer, that time for cookouts, family gatherings, and vacations.

In recent years our interest for the true meaning of Memorial Day may have increased, but sadly it is a holiday that few take the time to consider in its proper context. Memorial Day was first observed nationally on May 30, 1868, when flowers were placed on the graves of Union and Confederate soldiers at Arlington National Cemetery. Many argue that Memorial Day had its beginnings in the South with observances known as Decoration Day where women's groups were decorating the graves of fallen Confederates prior to the end of the Civil War. Whatever the case may be, Memorial Day is a holiday that has been set aside to honor those who died on the field of battle for the freedoms we enjoy today.

I fear that many in our country take the freedom that we enjoy for granted and never consider the awesome price that was paid to ensure our liberty. This is also true concerning the church. Often we come to the house of God and fail to consider the price that was paid that we might have liberty in Christ our Lord.

I am truly thankful for all of those who gave the ultimate sacrifice for my freedom, but I am most thankful for the Lamb of God who took my place on the cross. I am also thankful for the saints of God who endured afflictions and remained faithful to the Lord. On this Memorial Day weekend, I want to look at this passage of scripture and consider the [truths](#) revealed in the lives of those who enabled us to be here today and the [obligations](#) that we have to carry on in their stead. I want to preach on: [Looking Unto Jesus](#).

I. The Testimony of the Saints – [Wherefore seeing we are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses](#). The Hebrew writer begins with a reference to a host of witnesses. Who are these witnesses? What significance do they hold? To answer these questions we must consider the previous chapter. It is known as the “Hall of Faith,” where the heroes of the Bible are recorded. Their lives bear a testimony and a challenge to us.

A. They were Persecuted ([Heb.11:36-37](#)) – [And others had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment: They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented;](#) We can't begin to imagine the difficulty that the early Christians endured. Life was not easy for them. They were hunted like animals, rounded up and persecuted for their faith. Many were beaten and scourged. Others were falsely accused and sentenced to death. They were placed in arenas where they faced the gruesome

attacks of wild beasts or forced to fight unto the death. Countless Christians were crucified or burned at the stake. Life among the early believers was harsh and difficult. We cannot imagine what those who walked this road of faith before us endured.

- As I consider their sufferings I am reminded of the blessings that we enjoy today. We haven't faced the brutality of government toward those who believe. We have not met today in hiding for fear of our lives. I don't know of any that have been beaten or harmed for their faith. We are blessed beyond measure. God has been good to us and we ought to praise Him.
- There are those in our world today who do not enjoy the liberty to worship Christ publicly. There are those who must worship in hiding for fear of death. Many today will become a martyr for Christ somewhere in the world. Aren't you glad that we can come and worship freely?

B. They were Persistent (Heb.11:38) – (Of whom the world was not worthy:) they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth. These would not renounce their faith and abandon the Lord. Their lives could've been lived in ease had they walked away from their faith. Instead they chose to dwell in desert places, mountains, caves, and dens of the earth. They chose to live a life of solitude on the run rather than conform to the demands of this world. They had received something that the world could not offer or take away.

- Isn't that challenging? Those who walked before us chose to abandon the life they knew in order to serve Christ. They chose to face the difficulties and persecutions rather than abandon their faith. We have a relative life of ease. God has blessed us with every modern convenience. We have a beautiful place to come and worship. We have gathered today with those of like faith. There isn't one thing that stands in our way of serving the Lord except us.
- We have all that we could hope for and yet many times our service unto the Lord isn't persistent. We allow the smallest of inconveniences to hinder us from coming to the house of God and worshipping Him. How many had to sneak into church this morning? How many slept in a cave last night for fear of your life? How many of us have had our lives disrupted for the cause of Christ? When we consider all that those before endured and yet continued for the Lord, we ought to be ashamed of our lack of dedication.

C. They are Presented (1a) – Wherefore seeing we are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses. The context of this passage is dealing with a race. It paints the picture of a coliseum filled with those who have come to watch the race. The heroes of old are there to witness the race that we are to run. Life was hard, it ended in a tragic death for many, but they were victorious in Christ. They have overcome and finished their race. They are resting in the presence of the Lord in all of His glory.

- There is great encouragement for each of us in these verses. We haven't faced the trials and difficulties that many have, but we have our hardships nonetheless. Many have fallen out of the race due to its difficulty. Many have lagged behind and are in danger of dropping out all together. Listen, if those who came before could make, we can too! Just press on for the Lord!

I. The Testimony of the Saints

II. The Trial of the Saved (1b) – *Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us.* The focus now shifts from the testimony of the past to the trial of the present. The saints of old have run the race, they have set the pace and now the baton has been passed on to us. It is now our race to run. There are three conditions involved in the race that we are in.

A. Involves Preparation – *let us lay aside every weight.* I am not an experienced runner, but common sense would teach us that we need to get rid of unnecessary weight if we are to be successful in the race. Runners like to be as light as they can when it comes time to race. This has the idea of laying aside any “*burden, weight, or encumbrance that would hinder.*” There are a few things that are worth mentioning that hinder us.

- **Habits** – Often we allow personal habits or hobbies to hinder our walk with the Lord. We are creatures of habit and resist a new way of doing things. If it isn't within our routine we had rather not do it. Maybe we just need to get out of our comfort zone once in a while.
 - Personal habits also get in our way. Maybe there is something in your life that hinders you that you are aware of, but have been reluctant to abandon.
 - Many are so consumed with their own interests that they overlook their obligation for the Lord. There is nothing wrong with enjoying hobbies and personal time, but we must not allow that to consume and dictate our lives.

- **Hang-ups** – Many times we allow things to trip us up in the race of life. We get in a rut and can't seem to find a way out. We grow complacent with life as it is and fail to press on for the glory of God.
 - This is one of the greatest hindrances to the average Christian. We continue to do the same things we've always done, but there is no joy or excitement in serving the Lord. We need a renewal of spirit and a new found desire for Him. Lay aside the weight of complacency.

- **Hindrances** – How many times have we found ourselves hindered in the faith by something trivial. Often we get our feelings hurt or we get upset over the simplest of things. Someone said something that we didn't like; or we weren't asked to do something that we felt we should do.

- People get to the place that they are of no good to the Lord or His church because of every day hindrances. We allow the routines of life to keep us from serving the Lord. We justify it with the excuse that we are too busy or other things just had to be done. We need to take inventory of our lives and reestablish our priorities. Lay aside every weight that hinders.

B. Involves Purification – let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us. We not only need to rid ourselves of the things that weigh us down, but we need to rid our lives of the sin that so easily besets us. The phrase “so easily beset” refers to those things that *cling, distract, or entangle*. It has the idea of *skillfully surrounding*. We must rid our lives of sin and become pure before the Lord if we are to be used of Him.

- This is dealing with the sanctification of believers. The longer that we serve the Lord the more like Him we should become. When we were saved we were delivered from the penalty of sin. As we grow and mature in the Lord we are being delivered from power of sin.
- It is amazing how many today live as they please through the week and expect to come to church on Sunday morning as if nothing is wrong. The Lord cannot and will not use a dirty vessel. If we are to be successful in the race for Him our lives must be free of the sin that entangles us.
- How long has it been since you looked at your life? How long has it been since you have confessed your sin and sought forgiveness? Sin will hinder your walk with the Lord. It will keep you from His will and His blessing.
- Some of you have things right now that the Lord has revealed unto you, but you have been unwilling to confess. Your life is not as it should be. The joy of serving the Lord is not there as it once was. You can have that joy again, but you must get rid of the sin.

We are going to close with that this morning. Lord willing, we will continue with these thoughts tonight, but what about right now. We have considered those who have run the race before us. We have considered what is necessary for us to be successful in the race. Is there some weight that you need to lay aside? Is there some sin that you need to confess? Are you running the race today or are you sitting on the sideline?

Maybe you are here and you've never been saved. You haven't yet begun the race for the Lord. He stands ready to save you today if you will only come to Him.