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1 Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, 2 fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

We've spent ten glorious weeks this summer looking at the understanding of one word. One all important word; Faith

And we've discovered that the reason faith is important is because God declares His people to be righteous, not by their works, but because of faith.

We have put our trust in the completed work of Jesus, who came and lived a sinless life, born not of Adam's seed like all of us, but of a virgin, by the Holy Ghost.

He showed us what an un-fallen perfect son would look like, a person who wholly lives under the authority and will of the Father in heaven, and then He died a substitutionary death that each of us deserved and offered us a trade.

He takes our sin to the cross and bears the deserved punishment, and He gives to us in it's place, His righteousness.

After He accomplished that He rose from the dead on the third day and He appeared alive to His disciples and other witnesses and

ultimately to over 500 people, and then He ascended back up to heaven.

But He didn't leave us here alone in this hostile world. Hostile to Him, and now hostile to those He owns. He sent us the Holy Spirit to dwell with us and in us.

When we respond to the gospel, the good news of freedom from the debt of sin we owed and could not pay, He quickens us from the dead by His Holy Spirit, and makes us alive together with the risen Christ.

Actually, that's backwards, because fallen people would never respond. We learn later that He quickened us from the dead and supplied us with the very faith that we responded to Him with.

Listen to the logical progression of salvation that Paul lays out for us in his letter to the Ephesians. Chapter 2; He takes us step by step in the progression from sin and death that every son of Adam is born into, and how God transforms that spiritually dead person, dumbly following the prince of this world, to a living christian following God.

1 And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, 2 in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. 3 Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest. 4 But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, 5 even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), 6 and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, 7 so that in the ages to

come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.⁸ For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; ⁹ not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. ¹⁰ For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.

God takes the walking dead and He breathes life into them by joining them with His perfect risen son. We are "in Christ". We are conjoined together with Christ and positionally, with Him and in Him, we are already seated with Him in Heavenly places.

The faith that did that was breathed on you as a gift. You are His workmanship, His creation, and He created you alive together with Jesus, not to click on the TV and wait for Him to come and get you, He created you, you are his workmanship in order to do good works that He created for you to walk in.

The pivot point from death to life is the faith that He gave you as a gift.

Every child of God has that in common with every other child of God. God quickened you from the walking dead of this world and breathed life into you by the gift of the faith He has given to you.

The Hebrew christians that this letter was written to had some who were in danger of walking away from this new christianity which had brought conflict with the world, and seperation from family and their countrymen.

Some of them were close to abandoning their faith and going back to Judaism which held a certain comfort because that was the old dead comfortable world they had come out of.

And just previous to the chapter we have studied, the writer argues

that doing that, falling out of life and back into death, is impossible for someone who has real, living, God given faith.

*10:38 BUT MY RIGHTEOUS ONE SHALL LIVE BY FAITH; AND IF HE SHRINKS BACK, MY SOUL HAS NO PLEASURE IN HIM.
39 But we are not of those who shrink back to destruction, but of those who have faith to the preserving of the soul.*

Real faith doesn't give up and go back to the walking dead. Real faith perseveres and finishes God's will in this world, and then goes on to the glorious next one.

That was the lead in to chapter 11, the faith chapter. And the writer of Hebrews spends very little time trying to define faith. He really only spends a bout 3 verses on definition, clarification. Vs. 1 *Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.*

Faith is the belief in the things God has revealed to us in His word. The conviction of things we cannot see.

2For by it the men of old gained approval. 6And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him.

By faith we gain approval and without faith, it's impossible to please God.

And then this author simply launches into all the examples of faith in the lives of the heroes of the old testament. It's like he says, I can hardly define what faith is, but I can show you a thousand times what it looks like. Faith acts. Faith does. Faith works.

I work on old cars. I spend very little time studying the theory of

gasses and their physical combustability when compressed and ignited. All the different metallurgy of the different metals that have to withstand those explosions millions of times, and the lubrications necessary.

That's all great, and I have some basic knowledge there, but what I want to know is how do I actually accomplish the repairs on the things that wear out and break. I'm far better off watching a youtube of a guy fixing the thing I need to fix.

That has been our author's approach. A tiny bit of faith theory, and a ton of you tubes of faith in action. Here's the theory, Here's what real faith looks like when it's working.

God doing stuff only God can do, but through the agency of people who belong to Him, working with Him, He accomplishes His will in this hostile world.

Faith is necessary, and if you have real faith, here's a bunch of you-tubes of what it looks like. God is using you to accomplish impossible things that could only happen if He did them.

In these final verses this morning of chapter 11, and the resulting "therefore" of the first two verses of chapter 12, we get our marching orders.

Remember that when this was written, there were no chapter breaks and no verse numbers. It was written just like we would write a letter, or a story.

The author has opened the discussion of faith in chapter 10, shown us what real faith is and what it looks like in all of chapter 11 for one purpose.

That purpose is so that he can say; **Therefore**, in chapter 12. If we studied the whole chapter 11 and stepped away, we've missed the whole point of the exercise.

Here's what faith looks like, here's what faith looks like, this is what faith accomplished, over and over and over for one purpose. **Therefore**, all of this means something to you. Therefore all of this applies to you. We have to get to the "therefore". And we will.

Vs. 39 And all these, having gained approval through their faith, did not receive what was promised,

What do you say to a group of Christians and some maybe not Christians who are teetering on walking away from this new religion that perhaps they are feeling, hasn't delivered what they expected?

They came out of Judaism expectant of what? That Messiah had come, that the kingdom of God on earth would appear. That the promises would be realized.

Time passes. They instead of seeing the kingdom realized, actually have born years of separation from society and family and the old comfortable religion. Some have lost property. Some have gone to prison.

Is this what they signed up for? A hostile world?

What **did** we sign up for? We signed up for eternal life. A life together with God, a personal relationship with the God of creation in which His Holy Spirit dwells in our hearts.

He gives us the Holy Spirit as our downpayment of what we have

waiting for us in the future. But beyond that, in this world, what is it that we expect.

I mean, having God dwelling inside my heart and knowing my debt of sin is paid for is treasure that I wouldn't trade for anything else this world can offer.

What else can we expect though? In this world? Jesus said, *Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the age.* Mt. 28:20 We own that, but what can we expect in this world while we wait for the next one.

Jesus said, *In the world, you have tribulation, but take heart, I have overcome the world.* Jn. 16:33

That's kind of it. We have Him. Living in us. For all time. But beyond that, in this world that is ruled by the prince of the power of the air, expect trouble.

Anything beyond that, the blessedness of success and comfort and plenty that He gives to us is extra. That's blessings. But it isn't promised, and when trouble comes, we should be thankful for all the blessings we enjoyed, but not be surprised if in this world, they are fleeting.

John 16:32 - 33 *“Look, an hour is coming and has already come when you will be scattered, each to his own home, and you will leave Me all alone. Yet I am not alone, because the Father is with Me. 33 I have told you these things so that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take courage; I have overcome the world!”*

Jesus says, you guys are going to desert me, but I'm not alone, my Father is with me. And similarly he says; You're going to also

experience tribulation, separation, isolation from this world. Expect hostility. But you'll always have me, and ultimately, we win.

That's what we signed up for. That's what the Hebrew Christians signed up for. We have Him. He dwells with us and in us. But some of them were getting dis-illusioned. Discouraged. Maybe we'll go back to the old comfortable world and family and religion.

NO! Faith can't do that. Faith goes forward, not backwards. And vs. 39 explains something very important to them, and to us.

39 And all these, having gained approval through their faith, did not receive what was promised,

Nobody gets the promises, now, in this life. They didn't, and we don't.

Faith isn't faith if it gets all the goodies now. Faith is faith because we're waiting out this world, with all of its troubles and tribulations and disappointments, to receive the promises in the next one.

“Behold, the sower went out to sow; 4and as he sowed, some seeds fell beside the road, and the birds came and ate them up. 5“Others fell on the rocky places, where they did not have much soil; and immediately they sprang up, because they had no depth of soil. 6“But when the sun had risen, they were scorched; and because they had no root, they withered away. 7“Others fell among the thorns, and the thorns came up and choked them out. 8“And others fell on the good soil and yielded a crop, some a hundredfold, some sixty, and some thirty.

These Hebrew believers who were dis-illusioned and about to go

back, are like the plants that sprang up in the rocky soil and the world's hot sun beats on them and they give up and die. Or like the plants growing in the weedy soil and the world's tribulations and problems cause them to shrivel and die.

Real faith produces people like the plants in the good soil that against all odds, bear fruit.

You don't get the promises now. This world is full of challenges and troubles and headaches and discouragements, but you get Jesus living in you. You get Him. Now, with all the trouble. And if He is in you, you will bear fruit.

In the next world you get the promises.

39 And all these, having gained approval through their faith, did not receive what was promised, 40 because God had provided something better for us, so that apart from us they would not be made perfect.

The old saints, the examples of faith we looked at, they didn't get the promises, and we don't either. Not now. Not in this world. But we will receive all of the promises, with them, in the next one.

Real estate. From the Euphrates to the Mediterranean Sea, and sons, and adopted sons, numberless, like the sand of the seashore or the stars of heaven, and a King who rules in righteousness on David's throne, forever.

Those old saints of faith will receive those promises, with us. In the next world. Not this one.

What does that mean to those Hebrew saints, the discouraged beat down tired saints who were considering walking away from this

whole deal. And what does it mean to us. All these pictures of real faith in chapter 11?

1 Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, 2 fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Therefore! This is the message of the entire book. This is the pinnacle the author wanted to get to. This is the word to discouraged and dis-illusioned believers who are teetering on the cliff of walking away.

Therefore what? Therefore since we are surrounded by people who ran this race before and were triumphant by faith, even though they like you didn't receive the promises yet ;

Therefore, do what they did, and RUN!

You can look at the witnesses surrounding us two ways. Both are valid. We are surrounded by the saints who preceeded us in this relay race. They ran. They passed off the baton to us. Now they're watching us run to finish the race they invested in.

The other way to look at the witnesses is this. The world is looking at us. The world is watching the christians who are running, and we are the examples to them, as the old testament saints were the examples we looked at.

The world, more than ever, is watching the church. What they are seeing is mostly heart breaking. They aren't impressed. A bunch

of christians who have taken their eyes off of Christ and who are fighting with each other over how their ancestors treated each other? Really?

Bunch of christians fighting over the piece of the pie in this world they didn't get. Really? You need to apologize to me because your people treated my people bad and we didn't get what you got. Really?

OK, I'm sorry. Now get your eyes back on Christ and forget about this world, and run like you're running for the promises in the next world. Please. The world is watching us. It's embarrassing.

*I Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also **lay aside every encumbrance***

Fixating on racial problems of this world, past, and OH yes, very much so, present is an encumbrance.

Satan has a thousand different things for us to fixate on; instead of Jesus. Satan is laughing himself silly over christians fussing about racial issues. That's the current fight, inside the church, in case you haven't noticed yet. It's the next big deal for christians to fight with each other about. Racial equality in this world? Social justice in this world.

What did Jesus promise us in this world? Remember? Trouble!

I can't fix racial inequality in this world. It makes me sad. But I can't fix it. But I can sure take my eyes off of Jesus trying to fix this world that Jesus promised would be full of those kinds of trouble. Don't do that.

That's just one encumbrance, used this morning because it's current

and it's the perfect example of taking your eyes off the prize you are running for. Jesus.

You can't fix it. You can sympathize with those folks, listen if you get the chance, weep with them, briefly, and then remind them, this world is trouble. We need to get our eyes back on Jesus and get back in the race!

Encumbrances. Things that take your eyes off of Jesus. They come in every shape, size and fit. Satan has one especially designed for you.

Politics is an encumbrance. Getting richer than what God blessed you with is an encumbrance. Can easily and quickly be an encumbrance.

Whatever it is that you have fixated on, instead of Jesus, and running this race we're in if we belong to Him, is an encumbrance. Set it aside, and get in the race! The world is watching.

I Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us,

Satan has two ways to get you out of the race. He can get you wrapped around the axle with encumbrances.

Virtue signaling by getting closer to what this world calls politically correct in regards to racial problems isn't sin. Or maybe it can be. But it probably doesn't start that way. But it can get you out of the race. A good thing, but not the race.

The other way Satan gets you out of the race is sin. Sin is quicker. And more deadly. You were running like mad, and all of a sudden

Satan throws a lasso around both legs, just like calf roping.

Where did that come from. All of a sudden you're flying through the air on your way to a wreck.

One of my heroes. A speaker at the conference, and guy everybody loved to listen to. Used powerfully by the Spirit to speak to our hearts.

The lasso of adultery got him. He's out of the race. Big wreck. Dis-qualified! Satan loves to do that. But either thing is fine with him. Big ugly wreckage of sin, or some silly encumbrance that may or may not even be sin.

As long as he gets you out of the race . . . Win . . . for him. Loss for you, and the church, and the Kingdom, and the onlooking world.

*I Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, **and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us,***

So, we see this all the time, and I'm so very much affected by this next one; endurance.

You have to **keep running**. You can't get tired and quit.

MacArthur has this wonderful story about his college days. He was a runner. A pinch hitter of a runner. They would grab him if no one else better was available.

So he's in a relay race. Four guys, and they put him third because he's the weak link in the chain, and the fourth guy can run like the

wind, and make up for John.

So the first guy goes like mad and the second guy does too, and John is successful in getting the hand off and runs the best time in his whole life, and makes the hand off successfully to the fourth guy who is deadly fast.

And guy four runs 2/3 of the way around the course and stops and sits down. And of course the rest of the team charges over to see what happened. Is he dead. Did his heart give out. What happened. So they get there and ask him, what happened??!!

And he says, I don't know, I just didn't feel like running any more. You didn't feel like running?? What do you mean you didn't feel like running???!!

You'd not be mis-understood if you drug that guy off the track and beat him senseless. That would be your first thought.

But this happens all the time in God's race. Endurance. You don't get to stop and sit down. We have to stay in the race. There's another guy running just in front of you that's waiting for you to hand him the baton. You can't stop and sit down.

Encumbrances. Good causes. Sin, that rope around your legs, and endurance. All three can take you out of the race. How do we stay in?

2 fixing our eyes on Jesus,

We're running, and our eyes are fixed on the prize. We don't get sidetracked with all kinds of good causes. Encumbrances. And we don't get snagged by the lasso rope of sin. We run and we keep on running, with our eyes on Jesus.

In the roll of the book it is written of me . . . that Jesus. We keep our eyes on Him by reading and studying and listening and meditating about the things in this book.

That's how you fix your eyes on Jesus. This book should be flowing in your veins like life blood.

It was said of John Bunyan, the man who wrote Pilgrims Progress, 'you can prick him anywhere, and he bleeds bible' It was flowing in him. That's how you fix your eyes on Jesus.

It isn't about having emotional thoughts and listening to christian radio, all the latest songs. The only way to keep your eyes on Jesus, is to be in this book. Continually.

Jesus! . . . the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

We fix our eyes on Jesus, because we want to run for the glory of His Father, like He ran before us for His Father's glory.

who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame,

The author of our faith is our model. We want to run like He ran, even though we'll never have the difficulty he conquered.

The cross. Death. And the shame associated with that death. Real shame, because He took our sin. He bore our punishment.

He endured the cross and despised the shame, why? For the reward! That's how