



Sermon Transcription • Hebrews 12:1-2 (NIV)

Run

Pastor Jeff Bucknam

[Please Note: This transcript has been lightly edited for ease of reading. Also, some headings have been added in square brackets to aid the reader in locating portions of the sermon.]

Many of you know the name Charles Templeton, or perhaps you should know him. He's a famous Canadian, or infamous depending on your particular perspective. Charles Templeton is a name that people know who are older especially if they know the name Billy Graham. Billy Graham of course was the great evangelist in the Christian church. He used to go into these massive stadiums and share the gospel to the people all throughout the 1950's and all the way honestly, pretty much to the 1990's - lots and lots of years, probably the most famous Christian in the world for quite a period there. He's passed away since, and so has Charles Templeton. What's interesting about Charles Templeton and Billy Graham is that they were partners in ministry in the early days. In the 1940's they were both kind of considered up and coming preachers and public, tent meeting, evangelists - that's what they called it back in the 1940's when you wanted to reach out to your community. What you'd do is you'd have some big massive tent, you'd put it up in a field and you'd have all sorts of people come from all over the area to hear you preach in those days. It was an effective tool, right, in those days to preach the gospel. Charles Templeton is one of these guys in the 1940's, in fact in 1946 he was listed by the National Association of Evangelicals as one of the men "Best used by God," which I think is a little funny because I want to win that award to... like you know that's what I'm aiming for so that when I can go to the awards ceremony on the red carpet and come up front and "Yeah, I won! And I'd like to thank nobody." [Laughter] I just think it's funny, isn't it? You win "Best used by God". Anyway, 1946 he was listed as one of the men "Best used by God" by the National Association of Evangelicals - he was a pastor of a church in Toronto, Canada - of course, Avenue Road Church. He was involved in the early stages of Youth For Christ - you know might know that ministry, it still runs today. He and Billy Graham, in fact he introduced Billy Graham to it and recruited him to serve in that way. So they used to travel around and do lots of youth conferences and all sorts of stuff. And he was a big time preacher, he'd go and do these evangelistic meetings, they averaged about 150 converts a night, which is a quite a few in those days. On one occasion he went and did a revival meeting for a week in a town called Evansville, Indiana. And when he was there, the town of Evansville has 128,000 people in it, and 91,000 of the 128,000 people in the city came to hear him preach. So a really popular communicator, really effective, a lot of fruit from his ministry - was considered to be one of the great up and coming stars of the church until he completely abandoned the faith. In fact he said later that it was his abandoning of the faith happened over time, he started to have questions about some apologetic issues like, how can God and science, or the Bible and science be fit together? How can there be a good God and evil in the world? He just, he struggled with all that sort of thing and so he started to read very widely and began to believe a lot more of the secular thinking on it than the



Christian thinking upon it. Got in a big debate with Billy Graham about it, he didn't make that public yet, he kept preaching at these revivals. He started to say, "Listen I would preach at these meetings and I wouldn't believe a word I was saying. But I didn't actually have the guts to tell anybody until the last time I preach, I finished the message and decided I can't be a hypocrite anymore so I came down from the platform, I didn't talk to anybody, I just walked straight out the back of the church and I was done with it. He wrote a book a few years later called, *Farewell to God*, and in it he said these words,

"I oppose the Christian Church because, for all the good it sometimes does, it presumes to speak in the name of God and to propound and advocate beliefs that are outdated, demonstrably untrue, and often, in their various manifestations, deleterious to individuals and to society."

This series that we're doing here called, Run to Win, is trying to answer the question, what does the Bible say about the spiritual state about somebody like Charles Templeton - somebody who begins the race of faith, even does really well for a period of time and his case shares the gospel with so many and bears great fruit. There are people in Canada today who trace back their spiritual lineage to Charles Templeton in one of those tent meetings. Start so well, but doesn't finish. What do we say about someone like that? More importantly what does the Bible say about someone like that? The word that we use is apostate, apostasy, what do we say about that person? Will they hear God's commendation one day or condemnation? The answer that we've been probing, it's actually pretty obvious in the Bible. Hebrews 3:14 summarizes it really well,

"We have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original conviction firmly to the very end."

One of the conditions of ultimate salvation is that you believe til the end. That you start the race and even though it's going to get hard at certain points you persevere and through that perseverance God will bring you to a glorious home. But starting and not finishing - not an option. It's all for not. It's a dreadful thing, in fact, to fall into the hands of a living God. So how then, do we continue? I'm going to be talking about motivations for continuing in the faith and the reality that this is a command in Scripture and you get lots and lots and warning passages in the Bible, but how exactly should we do it? Are there any passages that talk about how we should go about doing this and what kinds of things we should avoid and that kind of stuff, and the answer is yes of course there are. The book of Hebrews in general does this, but particularly here in Hebrews 12:1-2. So this is a passage I'm sure many of you have memorized when you were little kids, right. Your mom and dad took you to church and you had to memorize this or you didn't get the cookies or the Bible Bucks or whatever they're giving out that particular day. So I'm going to look at it with you, two verses and I kind of want to pull it apart a little bit. I think it gives three answers to the question how - how do we continue. So here they are: number one, embrace your race; number two, run without the robe - that's a metaphor; and number three, welcome the witnesses. Embrace your race, run without the robe, welcome the witnesses.

[Embrace Your Race]



So here's the first of those, embrace your race. Look at Hebrews 12:1 with me,

“Therefore, [So you should know when it says therefore, it's building off of what was said in Hebrews 11 and it's very important. He listed a whole bunch of people who ran the race faithfully in Hebrews 11. Therefore,] since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, [all those people in Hebrews 11, witnessing to us.] let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance [and here's the part I'm particularly interested in here at the beginning. Let us run with perseverance] *the race marked out for us.*”

See somebody is marking out a race for us. You're not marking it out, you're the recipient of a race that's *being marked* out - you're the passive, somebody's the active. Who's the active - Sunday school answer is? Good! You could've said, God, Jesus, I'm happy with all that, Trinity, it's awesome. God is marking out a race for us, he orders the events of life in front of us and he says, “Run with perseverance this race called faith.” Now, here's my question, if God is marking out the race for all of us, is it the *same* for all of us? Is the race marked out identical for everyone of us? In fact in the ancient world they used to have these things called, race masters, which they still do today. Listen if you want to put on a fun run for something you're going to have to figure out a trail that they're going to have to run, and if you're really mean you might make them go up hills when they're really tired, or over lakes or something dumb like that, right. You are the race master, you're the one who's marking out the race. God is the one who's marking out the race, the question is does he do it exactly the same for everybody? And the answer of course is no, and you just know that instinctively, so you look at the people around you and you're like no, actually they're race, the things they have to overcome different than mine. And that's right, in fact if you go back to Hebrews 11 one of the of things that you find is the different races that people run are described there. So I'll give you an example, in Hebrews 11 right, just a few verses prior to Hebrews 12, Hebrews 11:32-38 - I read these last week, just listen to the way the author writes. He says,

“And what more shall I say? [Listing off all these great heroes of the faith. And what more shall I say?] I do not have time to tell about Gideon, Barak, Samson and Jephthah, about David and Samuel and the prophets, who through faith [they] conquered kingdoms, administered justice, and gained what was promised; [wouldn't that be great, see sometimes you have faith and you take a step of faith with God, and he rewards that faith *in* the immediate moment. 'Lord I'm going to trust you in this moment, I'm going to walk in your way and with your call.' And the Lord brings about *vindication* and you see it and tell all your friends about it - you put it on Facebook. 'Look what God did, look what he did.' And man he has done some great things like that, rewarding people for their faith in the immediate moment. Who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, and gained what was promised;] who shut the mouths of lions [Remember Daniel and the lions den? 'Get in there Daniel, you're not bowing down to the king.' And Daniel's like, 'Fine just throw me in there I'll just pet those babies.' And then he does - that've been cool petting the lions in there!], quenched the fury of the flames [Shadrach Meshach and Abednego, the guys who throw them in the fiery furnace get singed and burned



it's so hot, but they're inside there with a fourth, probably Jesus, who's walking around in there and they're doing a little dance in that fiery furnace. *That* would have been great. They're faith and commitment to God was rewarded <clap> right away, we love this kind of stuff, right. This is what we're looking for in this life. Quench the fury of flames verse 34], and escaped the edge of the sword; whose weakness was turned to strength; and who became powerful in battle and routed foreign armies. [Yeah I'm into that man!] Women received back their dead, raised to life again. [But it's not always that way is it? I mean for some it's that way ... but not always. See] There were others who were tortured, refusing to be released so that they might gain an even better resurrection. [See] Some faced jeers and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. They were put to death by stoning [and as the stones rained down on them, they cried out to God, 'Deliver me! I'm walking in faith Lord.' And what they got was silence from heaven, died right there.]; they were sawed in two; they were killed by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted and mistreated—[see] the world was not worthy of them. They wandered in deserts and mountains, living in caves and in holes in the ground.”

Do you see what he's doing here? He's basically saying, “Yeah sometimes you see the outcome of your faith in the immediate time, cause for some people that's the race that God has marked out for them, but in other cases it's not quite like that. In other cases, the race marked out for you is different. You know this cause you have friends, maybe you are the friend who has cancer, if one friend with cancer and you have another friend with cancer, they contracted basically at the same time, or find out from the doctor about the same time. And you're praying for this one and you're praying for that one. You're praying at the same time sometimes for both of them. You include them together in your prayer. Both Christians, one's family is surrounding them with all sorts of prayer and support while the other family surrounding them for all sorts of prayer and support. The first goes to the doctor, you know four months later, maybe after having a little treatment, or maybe not. They just show up at the doctor and they do the tests and they say, “It's gone! I don't know what happened,” says the doctor, “But there's none there anymore.” Then they go on the social media, “You won't believe this, God healed me!” And they have a party and there are balloons there. And everybody crying and, “Praise God! He heals! We had faith and the Lord vindicated that faith in the here and now.” Love that, yeah, that's what we're aiming at yeah? But meanwhile that other family seeing all that happening, and they pray even harder now. <Sigh> And in the end, their loved one dies. Same faith, one vindicated in the here and now, one has to wait for the vindication.

So why is that the way it works? Why doesn't God just, you know, do it the same for all of us. Isn't that our hearts cry? “Hey God, cause of fair, the way it should work is that what I get, is what they get, and what they get is what I get, and we tend to peer over the fence at their race all the time going, “Why is there's harder than mine, come on God. I'm over here doing the tough mudder and they're over there, just on a lounge chair.” Why are some delivered in this world while others remain afflicted, and the answer of course cause God marks out a different race for all of us, just as you have a particular race, doesn't mean that theirs is your race and theirs later might be different than yours.



You know what it's so great to see that in the Bible that this has been a problem that they've dealt with before we got here. Right so I'll show you Peter, after the resurrection, he sees Jesus. Of course he wandered away from Jesus and then he comes back. And Peter then is confronted by Jesus on a beach, he confesses, "Yes I was basically wrong." Then they have a conversation and in this conversation Jesus says to Peter, "Your future is really going to be hard, you're going to die in a very hard way." Here's what he says, John 21:18-22,

"Very truly I tell you, when you were younger you dressed yourself and went where you wanted; but when you [grow] old you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go.' [So, "Peter, this is your future, you're going to be looking like this at some point when someone drags you up to some cross and they're going to hang you on it. So for you to take up your cross daily and follow is probably going to be literal.' That's a prophecy about the Lord Jesus about his future. Peter hears that and he's probably like you would be if you heard that. 'Eeeeh!'] Jesus said [verse 19] this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God. Then he said to him, 'Follow me [Peter]!' [I know it's hard but you follow, it's the race that's been marked for you, follow me.] ... Peter [God bless him, verse 20, he's my boy, Peter] turned and saw that the disciple whom Jesus loved was following them. (This was the one who had leaned back against Jesus at the supper and had said, 'Lord, who is going to betray you?') [John is saying, 'That's me.' So John is following these guys, and Peter sees him.] When Peter [verse 21] saw him, he asked, '[Yeah but] Lord, what about him? [Listen if I've got to deal with all of that, cause of fair. 'Lord if I'm going to deal with all of that nonsense what about ... Ezra?' Even Stephen Lord! Lord what about him, [verse 22]' Jesus answered, '[Look] If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you? You must follow me. [You... follow... me!]'"]"

See there's this massive temptation that you and I have to look over in that other lane all the time, and it tends to make us veer off course. See I say that because I used to swim, I know that shocks you, I used to swim competitively right, I was actually pretty fast - it's probably cause I float really well, okay. So I used to swim competitively as a kid that was in all sorts of swimming races and these sorts of things and short distances, 50 metres, 100 metres. When you jump in the pool and you're swimming that distance you know it looks like splashing everywhere from above, but underneath you can see the bubbles coming up from the people next to you. You can really judge where you are, every time you take a turn, everytime you look to the side, you can see it. You can, in those races get so concerned about the guy next to you, and if you are so concerned about whether they're getting ahead or behind, you're constantly keeping your eye on them - what will end up happening is you'll start veering into one of the lane markers. And if you hit the lane marker, you loose. You just can't catch up, it will break up your stroke so much that you can't get it back, not over a short distance. Isn't that the way so many of us are though? We're always looking over to the other lane and saying, "Yeah but I'm focusing on them." And meanwhile we're veering off course ourselves cause we're complaining to God and, "I'm not going to follow you if this isn't fair!" That's, not your race! It's not your race. He's marked out a race for you.



I was talking to a church planter recently at a church planting conference - about 350 church planters. I spoke at this conference. He privately came up to me afterwards and he said, "Can I talk to you in this other room?" I said, "Yup." He said, "So here's the deal, I've been sitting at the table with all these other church planters every night over the last couple of days at this conference. And here's what I hear at my table, everyone starts announcing all the great things that are happening in their church plant. 'I've been going for a year and we've got 400,000 people. The growth is so big and dramatic we're not even sure how to manage it.' And then the next person goes, 'Yeah well we're reaching the city in ways this city's never been reached before, and it's amazing and wow, and amazing.'" He said, "I hear this every night from several of these different people but I got to tell you," he said, "But I've been doing this for seven years and I got 30 people in my church. And I've heard those people lead and preach and do the stuff, we're the same person, man! So you tell me, what am I supposed to do with that?" he says.

"Well you're supposed to stop looking over the fence at their race, that's what you're supposed to do with that. God didn't call you to pastor their churches, God called you to pastor your church. You got 30 people, - pastor the 30 people, preach to the 30 people. Bloom where you're planted man. How many cliches do you want me to give you there?" Embrace ... your ... race... that's been marked out for you, it's God's sovereign will that you bloom where you are. So you tell me what is it that you're facing right now? What challenge? "I don't want to be in the midst of this challenge!" I know you don't! I don't... nobody wants to face that portion of the race when they got to climb the dumb hill. That's the hill that you're called to climb today. You know the great thing is that the Lord says, "I'm with you always, even to the end of the age." So run ... *your* race. Race your race.

[Run Without the Robe]

Second, run without the robe, again I need to clarify the metaphorical nature of that because my fear is that some of you go out and, "My pastor said I should do this..." So no that's not, [laughter] no metaphor, right. So here we go - run without the robe. We'll read the verse again okay, Hebrews 12:1,

"Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, [Now here's the part I'm particularly interested in in this section.] let us throw off *everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles*. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us"

So in order to run this race and run it well there are going to be some things that get in the way, right, some hindrances. My friend, Alan, was a marathon runner - he became one when we were in seminary. He used to go out and run his warm up marathon stuff which was like 20 miles, or 18 miles or whatever, he used to run that and ask me if I'd come along, and of course I was like, "Yeah on my bike." So I used to go out on my bike and ride next to him. Honestly I was never really out of breath the whole time. He's like <panting heavily> I'm like, "C'mon pick it up." So we would go out - so I kind of became his partner in this adventure, and so he would take me, explain to me what is it that he was doing. One of the things he was doing was he was cutting back on all the fun food's that I wanted to eat with him, right - there's a lot of really good food in Dallas, Texas. So I kept eating it and he would be like, I'd go to these places and say, "Man let's get a hamburger from Chili's." And he'd say, "I'm only having a salad."



“Ah, come on man! How about some cheese fries?”

“No I can’t do that,” right because he says, “like mile 24, I’m going to be thankful I didn’t eat the cheese fries, Jeff.” Probably. He took me into the mall with him one day, our wives went shopping somewhere else. He said, “I got to buy a shorts for this New York city marathon.” So we went into the shorts shop, the running room or whatever it was called, and he was trying them on. I was sitting in a chair, kind of outside eating the cheese fries, and he was trying out these shorts. And he would come out and go, “What do you think?” And he’d say, “Do these look good on me?”

“No they make your bum look big.” [Laughter] So when he came out he would like bounce up and down, you know, run in place, and then he’d kind of trot around the store, it was really awkward. He was trotting around the store and he’d come back out and, “No these aren’t going to work.”

“Why aren’t they going to work, they’re fine!”

“Nah, they get in the way. I don’t want anything getting in the way.” Right, listen, if you’re going to run a race like that, you got to cut down all the hindrances, the cheese fries and the weight that they’re going to add. You don’t want to carry that. Floppy, basketball shorts, get rid of those!

That’s the way they used to do it of course in the first century when they were really into their running races - they were, they used to fill stadium full, like think about the Olympics now a days. It was like that back those days, that was the thing that you did. But the runners used to come out robed and literally disrobe, like off, ain’t nothing underneath there. Right, running in their birthday suits. Down and then they got robed up again. Cause they didn’t didn’t want anything getting in the way. And this is the image that the writer of Hebrews is playing with. He’s basically saying, “Listen if you’re going to really run the race, and this one counts guys more than just what you’re going to get at the end of 100 metre, the little gold medal you get - no we’re talking about like eternal life. If you are going to run this race, you better figure out what it is that’s slowing you down.” And so he says there’s two things that will slow you down. One of them, he says, “let us throw off everything that hinders *and* [too] the sin that so easily entangles.” And most of us in the room when I say the sin that so easily entangles, you’re like, “Yeah, yeah, sin gets in the way, of course!” If you keep going back to habitual sin it will, it will lead you away from Christ ultimately, so you got to cast that aside. We’re all agreed on that, but that’s not all he says that’s going to get in the way. It’s everything that hinders *and* the sin. So what’s the everything that hinders? Or to be clearer about it, what non-sinful things get in the way of us following Jesus?

It’s interesting Jesus, he actually answers that very question. So Greg at the beginning of this series, he talked the parable of the soils, the parable of the sowers; Jesus tells a story about how he’s like - him preaching the Word of God, and the message of salvation to people was like a farmer who goes out into his field and he just throws a bunch of seed everywhere. And the seed lands on different soils, different people’s hearts receive it differently. The first kind of heart, the first kind of soil that it lands in, is just the hard path - they just don’t believe it at all and Satan comes and takes it away immediately. You know people like this, the moment that you tell them about Jesus they’re like, “Ahhh, uck, stop talking to me about religion, stop it.” Just not interested. The second kind of soil, kind of hard, it lands in, the rocky soil, it’s got a layer of bedrock underneath and so the plant starts to grow up a little bit but the roots can’t go very deep, so when the hot sun comes up, you know Middle East, it burns that plant and it just doesn’t have the depth to keep going. So even though it started really well, it just



doesn't finish very well. Listen, no farmer in the world is excited about that. "Alright it started well, but now it's dead!" No - it's not how it works. Family's not going to eat because of that. The fourth soil, he says, is the good soil. Where you know the Word of God comes and hits people and they receive it with joy and they keep going, and even though they have the same hot sun and everything, roots go deep enough, they fight off all the other temptations by the power of God and they yield a crop: 30, 60, 100 times. But it's that third soil that he says, okay, it's not just the rocky soil where it starts off a little well, and then dies - there's this third soil where it starts off really well, right the seed lands in it, the Word of God lands in the heart, and it receives it well early and then it starts to grow, but there's this other stuff, the weeds, the thistles that choke it out. You know there's a competition in the soil for water, and you know the weeds always win, right, just go out in August and look at weeds are winning, is what you'll say. But what are the weeds? What are the things, says Jesus, that compete with your budding faith. Listen to what he says, Luke 8:14, he said,

"The seed that fell among thorns stands for those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by [ready?] life's worries, riches and pleasures, and they do not mature."

Wait a minute man, that's like my whole life is about worrying about stuff, gaining riches, and being pleased - I promise you, like that's my goal everyday. "Oh Lord, more money, more pleasure." So in other words, the very things that I'm seeking after if loved it the wrong way and too much, can actually end up competing with the budding faith in my life? Jesus' is like, "Yeah that's exactly right." Even the good stuff can choke out faith.

There's a guy who's a conference speaker, I went to a number of years ago. <laughing> He was talking about this passage and he said at one point, in his - if I'd mention his name you'd all know who he is, but he's like really earnest guy and he said, "I own ... I own a leather couch in my home, I just purchased a leather couch. And it's the most dangerous thing I own!" <laughing> What? Do you have a dog? Like, "When I'm sitting in that couch I don't want to go anywhere, I don't want to sacrifice for the evangelization of the billions who don't know Christ, I don't think about the poor, I just want to sit. It tempts me into thinking that my life is about rest, my life is about comfort, and my life is not about discipleship that's hard."

Look I'm not suggesting that you become a monk, okay, or that we become monks. "That's it I'm going away into the woods and having nothing." I'm not suggesting - God gives us good gifts that we might enjoy life right, all sorts of things. But what you need to understand is some of those good gifts that God gives you, can be loved more than God. And when you start to love those things more than God, and they end up being things that you're not willing to sacrifice for his kingdom sake, they end up taking a place in your heart like a weed, and you don't worship God anymore, you just worship them. You say, "My needs are going to be met by these things, these good things, my family, my money, my couch." Some things don't help our devotion to Jesus. Some things slow our running, you say, "Okay, but be practical like couches, come on that's the best you got pastor?" Okay, let me give you some real examples here of what I'm talking about.



My friend in New Zealand's name was Ralph, he played for the New Zealand national basketball team. In New Zealand the national team for rugby was called the All Blacks, and the national team for basketball was called the Tall Blacks - that's not a joke, they actually were called the Tall Blacks. He was a Tall Black and he played in the 2000 Sydney Olympics and he played against Magic Johnson, he said it was the best game he ever played in his life and Magic only scored 40. So Magic's a pretty good player. He was a really good player as well, I used to play with him a little bit, he was just a remarkable shooter, he was fantastic. Anyway, he did *not* play for one of the teams in the country though, he played for the national team, but not one of the teams in the league in the country. So I asked him, "Why are you not playing in the league, you're such a good player you could probably make a living at this." He said, "Oh I used to play on one of the club teams around."

"Really? Why'd you stop?" He said, "Jeff to be honest with you, I got to the point - I got married, and I got to the point after I got married, that the lifestyle that I was leading was something that was actually injuring my faith. Like the temptations that were there, the person I was becoming, I found that I'd start the basketball season committed to Christ, and then about half way through to three quarters of the way through I started to question whether or not following Jesus was as good as all the temptations I was being presented with. So honestly, I just gave up, I just said no I'm not going to do this anymore. I did it because I want to walk with Jesus more than I want to be a basketball player."

"But basketball is a good thing Ralph!"

"Yeah I know, but it hindered me."

Another example, my friend, Hamps is what we call him, his last name's Hampton, he was from New Zealand. When we moved here he came here for six months and stayed with us - they do that sometimes so be careful. [Laughter] He came and he stayed with us and he's a farmer, he managed a farm in New Zealand and so he, while he was here he started ... he got an offer for a very lucrative contract in Chili right, South America right. "Do you know Spanish Hamps?"

"No, nah! I can learn it though."

"Well how much more money is it?"

"Dude it's triple my salary."

"Wow, that's a lot."

"And it's cheaper to live there. I could get really rich doing this Jeff."

"Wow, okay."

"But tell me what do you think?"

"Well is there a good church there?"

"What!?"

"Brother, is there a good church there? Listen I don't mean - it's cool if it's Spanish, you can learn Spanish, but like is there a good church there, like faithful church where they're going to preach the gospel, you know don't forsake the meeting of yourselves together as is the habit of some, but encourage each other daily as long as it's called today. Like it's really important, if you stop attending a local church, I can guarantee you that in a few years you're probably going to be drifting away from the faith. It's one of God's ways of keeping you." "Well I don't know," he said.

"Well you should probably research that." He goes away, he comes back the next day, "There's not a single good church in that area, at least one that I can tell."

"So what are you going to do?" He said, "It's not worth it."



“All that money, Hamps, it’s not worth it?”

“Not worth it, not if it costs me my faith.” Right there’s some things that pose a danger of choking it out. So what is it that hinders you? I’m not saying give it up, I’m saying, put a big yellow flag around it and say, “I’m watching you, good thing. You’re not going to get in the way of the main thing.”

[Welcome the Witnesses]

Alright, last one, welcome the witnesses. Hebrews 12:1-2,

“Therefore [verse 1], since we are surrounded by such a great *cloud* of witnesses [notice the image, stadium, surrounding us, all these people], let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, [then we] fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.”

Big stadium, right, and we have a bunch of people who are witnessing us, but they aren’t any kind of witness. They’re not the fans that cross their arms and say, “Okay, perform for me.” That’s not the kind of witnessing he’s talking about here. He’s saying, “Yes they are witnessing us, but they’re also witnessing *to us*. Cause they’re people who have run this run this race before, so when they cheer, they cheer with directions, they cheer with energy that says, “Keep running, I did it, think about what I did and do that.”

Good image maybe that helps describe what I’m saying here is you know if I go to a hockey game and I watch the hockey game go on, I might every once and a while pound on the glass saying, “Go!” right. But if Wayne Gretzky comes to a hockey game and he pounds on the glass, he’s going to say, “Cycle the puck!” I don’t know what that means, but I know people say that when they’re hockey... “Cycle the puck!” Do this, do that and when Wayne Gretzky’s cheering he’s not just witnessing them, he’s witnessing *to them*, isn’t he? “I’ve done this better, in fact, if you want to succeed follow in my footsteps.” You do realize that we have a history of people in the Christian church in the Bible, Hebrews 11, *and* in Christian history, *and* in the present time who are pounding on the glass saying, “Run, run with perseverance, there is a reward and it’s great.” And they witness to us.

Let me tell you about one of my favourite guys in the history of the church that actually was this way. It’s a name you should know, he’s name’s Adoniram Judson. Adoniram Judson was a missionary in the 1800’s to Burma. The way he got to Burma, Burma’s southeast Asia, it’s called Myanmar now. The way he got there is fascinating. He grew up in a Christian home, Dad was a pastor, he went away to college at Brown University which was a Christian college in those days, but at this Christian college he met a friend, Jacob Eames and Jacob Eames was a deist, which basically means atheist, and Jacob Eames drew Adoniram Judson away from the faith. “Ah you don’t want to believe in God, there is no heaven, there is no hell.” He didn’t tell his dad, Judson, for four years. He came back from college, played the game, came back four years later, said to his dad, “I don’t believe anymore.” Parents heartbroken, and he went off a couple days later, on horseback, to live his life, pursue his



dreams. He was going to be an actor - it didn't work out. And he was kind of down on his luck four or five years later and he, he was stopped at an inn on the side of the road and he was staying the night there and in the room next to him there was some young man who was screaming for his life, who was dying and was in agony. So in the morning - the screams stopped about midnight, and Judson went down in the morning and asked the innkeeper, what was going on in the room next to me, and they said, "Well there was a man there, a young man about your age who died overnight and we're so sorry that he was screaming and things like that." And Judson was like, "It's fine, that's awful. Does anyone know who he was?" And the answer to the question was, "Yeah, his name was Jacob Eames."

I just want you to think about the providence here, that God in his providential, sovereignty, placed Judson in the room next to Eames, the guy who drew his heart away from faith, and this guy died in his hearing, the one who was saying, "Ah there's no heaven, no hell." When he faced the end of his life was in terror! And so Judson said, "I don't know what to do that."

Can I just pause right here? So many of us have friends and family members, right, friends and family members who don't believe and we're in the middle of that time where they've run away from the faith, and we're like "Oh Lord we don't know what's going to happen!" God's on the move man, God's on the move. Christian history is filled with people who have walked away and come back right. Alright back to the sermon, play.

So this guy, this guy, Judson, goes back to his dad says, "Listen, I'm in. I'm in with Christianity, but not only in with Christianity I want to go to Burma man, cause there's nobody there who knows the gospel." So he does, he gets married, he heads to Burma, his wife is pregnant when they get on the boat - it's a four month boat ride. During the middle of the boat ride they have a child who is stillborn. Heartbroken. They eventually arrive, seven years of work yields 18 converts. He tries to translate the Bible there, it's very difficult. He stands up, he erects what they call a zyat, it's a little preaching stool on the side of the road and he'd climb up there and in Burmese announce who Jesus was. That's what all the Buddhists did so he just did it but about Jesus. 18 converts in 7 years. In that time, they have another child who dies, 17 months old.

He gets thrown into prison eventually cause he's got white skin and the Burmese don't really like the British at this point. So he gets thrown into prison as a British spy, or suspected British spy. His wife, pregnant again, walks two miles to the jailhouse everyday to plead his cause; two miles home, day after day. She gives birth to the child and takes the child with her to do this. He finally gets let out of prison - this prison by the way, they used to lift his legs up every night off of the ground; lift his legs up and suspend them so that the only part of his body that was on the ground was his shoulders and his head - all night long. He considered suicide repeatedly for those 17 months in prison, but miraculously he gets released from prison. The church that he started, the converts they've scattered, the church is dead, and his wife dies six months later, and the baby that she had, six months after that. Three kids, all dying under the age of two, his wife gone, his translation in tatters, and nobody. Can you just imagine that for a minute. In sorrow he goes up to the middle of the woods and he builds a little hut and he digs a grave next to that hut and he sits on the edge of that grave every day and pictures himself in it. One of his biographers, Richard Pierard said,



“The barbaric treatment he had endured, the ‘bitter, heart-rending anguish’ of losing his beloved Ann [his wife], and the total destruction of his little church in Rangoon left Adoniram overcome with grief. For over a year he lived in a retreat in the woods, mourning his wife and child and struggling with his own past pride and ambition. He even dug his own grave and sat beside it, imagining how he would look lying in it. On the third anniversary of [his wife] Ann’s death, he wrote, ‘God is to me the Great Unknown. I believe in him, but I find him not.’... But Adoniram’s faith sustained him, and he threw himself into the tasks to which he believed God had called him. He worked feverishly on his translation of the Bible. The New Testament had now been printed, and he finished the Old Testament only a few years later. He also ordained the first Burmese pastor—one of his original converts—who refounded the church in Rangoon.”

Guys, there are 3,500 baptist churches today in Myanmar that draw their lineage to that guy! Because he saw the challenge in front of him which was overwhelming, the hill that was marked out for him and he kept, he kept going and trusting God and he saw in his lifetime the outcome of his labours and in centuries after, man God has worked. And he stands, listen, he’s pounding on the glass, “Run!!!! I know you face challenges, all of us face challenges and difficulties, run the race marked out.

And we have an even better witness don’t we? I mean we fix our eyes, did you notice that, on Jesus, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and then he sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Can you imagine being Jesus on the cross with all these people who you made mocking you. You could disband the molecules of their body by just thinking it. And yet you receive it defecating on yourself. Why? For the joy set before him, for the victory and the reward that was his at the end, the right hand of the throne of God. And Jesus stands at the glass, and he says, “Run, I’m going to run with you. Never leave you, never forsake you. Run.” Embrace your race, run without the robe, welcome the witnesses. Amen? Let me pray for us.

Father, I’m so thankful for your word, and I pray Father that you’d make these things a reality in us. Let’s die in Jesus we pray, let your Spirit do that work. He who began a good work in you is faithful to complete it until the day of Christ. And so we trust in that, and believe in that and help us to walk in that way, with whatever it is we face in front of us. In Jesus name we pray, Amen.