

WITNESSES

“Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, 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, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our 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. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.” (Heb. 12:1-3).

- Life is not a stroll in the park, it is a race.
- We are running this race in public and are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses.
- We must throw off anything that would “hinder” or “entangle” us from winning this race.
- Jesus Christ is our example, and we must focus our eyes on Him.
- Jesus endured the suffering and scorn of the cross but still won the race of life.
- We must consider His example to keep from growing weary and losing heart.
- Please remember that the race we are running is being observed by many witnesses.

WHO ARE THESE WITNESSES?

GOD

The first and most important witness of our race is God Himself. Many violent crimes are committed at night to avoid being seen by witnesses. This is ridiculous, for God sees at night as clearly as He does in the day. David testified to this: **“Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there. If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast. If I say, ‘Surely the darkness will hide me and the light become night around me,’ even the darkness will not be dark to you; the night will shine like the day, for darkness is as light to you.” (Ps. 139:7-12)**

God not only sees everything we do, but also knows what we are thinking when we do it. **“You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar. You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways. Before a word is on my tongue you know it completely, O Lord” (Ps. 139:2-4).**

THE SPIRITS OF RIGHTEOUS MEN MADE PERFECT

Our race is also being witnessed by the spirits of righteous men who have died. The book of Revelation reveals that the righteous dead are aware of what is going on upon the earth. **“I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God and the testimony they had maintained. They called out with a loud voice, ‘How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?’” (Rev. 6:9-10).**

Hebrews 11 lists great heroes and heroines of the faith. They **“Faced jeers and flogging, while still others were chained and put in prison. They were stoned; they were sawed in two; they were put to death by the sword. They went about in**

sheepskins and goat skins, destitute, persecuted and mistreated – the world was not worthy of them. They wandered in deserts and mountains, and in caves and holes in the ground. These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what they had been promised. God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect” (Heb. 11:36-40)

THE VERY NEXT VERSE STATES “Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us through off everything that hinders . . .” The word “therefore” connects these verses together. The great heroes and heroines of the faith listed in chapter 11 are the great cloud of witnesses who are watching us as we run the race of life.

A few verses later, when describing Christian worship, the writer of Hebrews describes the spiritual nature of Christian worship. When we meet together in the church we come to “**Mt. Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly to the church of the firstborn whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the Judge of all men, to the spirits of righteous men made perfect, to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel**” (Heb. 12:22-24).

It is obvious that those in the spirit world are witnessing what we are doing!

ANGELS

It is therefore also obvious that angels are witnessing what we do.

- Angels are ministering spirits sent to serve those who are the heirs of salvation (Heb. 1:14). They have to watch us so they can help us when we are in need.
- Little children have angels in heaven who behold the face of our Father in heaven (Matt. 18:10).
- There is rejoicing in the presence of the angels when one sinner repents (Lk. 15:10).
- The apostles were made a spectacle to the whole universe, including angels as well as men (1 Cor. 4:9).
- Women ought to dress appropriately in church “because of the angels” (1 Cor. 11:10).
- Paul gave Timothy a charge in the sight of God, Christ Jesus, and the elect angels (1 Tim. 5:21).
- We should welcome strangers for by so doing some have entertained angels without know it (Heb. 13:2).
- When we die angels carry us to paradise (Lk. 16:22).
- Surely angels are “witnessing” what we do!

RULERS, AUTHORITIES, AND POWERS

- Our struggle is not against “flesh and blood”, but “**against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms**” (Eph. 6:12). These “spiritual forces of evil” are also watching us.
- These spiritual forces now see the “mystery” that was hidden in ages past. “**His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, according to his eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord**” (Eph. 3:10).

- Not only are we “witnessed” by God, good spirits, and good angels, but we are also “witnessed” by the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.

OUR FAMILY

No one witnesses our actions more closely than the members of our own family. This is why leaders in the church must have the respect of their family. A man might fool his neighbor, but he cannot fool his family. Therefore, a leader in the church **“must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him with proper respect. (If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God’s church?) (1 Tim. 3:4-5).**

Paul’s letter to Titus adds: **“An elder must be blameless, the husband of but one wife, a man whose children believe and are not open to the charge of being wild, and disobedient” (Titus 1:6).**

Jesus once told of a rich man who died and went to a place of torment. Apparently, for the first time, the rich man became aware of the bad influence he had been to his family. The rich man was good at making money, but not at worshiping God. He was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day. Sadly, he had made no preparations for eternity. Now, perhaps for the first time, he finally wanted his family to have a good spiritual witness. He cried out to father Abraham: **“I beg you father, send Lazarus to my father’s house, for I have five brothers. Let him warn them, so they will not come to this place of torment.” (Lk. 16:27-28).**

His request was denied! After we die it is too late to have a positive influence on those who “witness” our life! We must work while it is day, for the night is coming when no one can work (Jn. 9:4).

Someone has said that no one goes to heaven alone, and no one goes to hell alone. Invariably we influence others for either good or bad. It is sad to go to hell, but it is even sadder to go to hell and realize that you took members of your family with you!

THE WORLD

Paul said that the apostles were made a spectacle to “whole universe”, to “angels”, as well as to “men” (1 Cor. 4:9). We are too! The world is watching how we run the race of life.

Jesus said to His disciples: **“You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men” (Matt. 5:13).** Salt is a preservative. If there had been ten righteous people in Sodom God would not have destroyed it (Gen. 18:32). The way we run the race does make a difference.

Jesus continued: **“You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it give light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven (Matt. 5:14-16).** Surely the world is watching!

When the church in Jerusalem let their light shine they **“Enjoyed the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved” (Acts 2:47).**

When Peter and John let their light shine by healing a crippled man at the gate of the temple, everybody in Jerusalem knew about the miracle (Acts 4:16).

“Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles called Barnabas (which means son of encouragement), sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles’ feet” (Acts 4:36-37). The generosity of this godly man shined like a bright light and so encouraged everyone that the apostles called him the “son of encouragement”!

When Peter raised Dorcas from the dead **“This became known all over Joppa, and many people believed in the Lord” (Acts 9:42).**

The first gentile to become a Christian was a centurion named Cornelius. He also let his light shine! **“He and all his family were devout and God-fearing; he gave generously to those in need and prayed to God regularly” (Acts 10:2).** Even the angels saw his light for an angel appeared to Cornelius and said: **“Your prayers and gifts to the poor have come up as a memorial offering before God” (Acts 10:4).**

Paul wrote to the Thessalonians: **“You became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you welcomed the message in the midst of severe suffering with the joy given by the Holy Spirit. And so you became a mode to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia. The Lord’s message rang out from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia—your faith in God has become known everywhere. Therefore we do not need to say anything about it, for they themselves report what kind of reception you gave us. They tell how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead—Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath” (1 Thess. 1:6-10).** Paul was only in Thessalonica for three Sabbath days (Acts 17:2), yet this young church let their light shine not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but “everywhere”!

When the church functions as it should, our Christian witness will cause those who do not believe, or who are unlearned, to fall down on their face and worship God (1 Cor. 14:24-25).

Peter also encouraged believers to let their light shine. He wrote: **“Dear friends. I urge you as aliens and strangers in the world to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul. Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us” (1 Pet. 2:12).**

IT IS OBVIOUS THAT WHEN WE RUN THE RACE OF LIFE, THE WORLD IS WATCHING!

SOMETHING YOU MUST BELIEVE

“And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and rewards those who earnestly seek him” (Heb. 11:6). Note that this verse

mentions two things that you “must believe”. (1) You must believe that God exists. (2) You must believe that God rewards those who seek him.

Seeking and finding God, however, must be done earnestly. Jeremiah said: **“You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart” (Jer. 29:13).**

Believing that God will reward those who earnestly seek Him is not an option. It is something you “must believe”!

Here is Paul’s inspired advice to Timothy: **“Be diligent in these matters; give yourself wholly to them, so that everyone may see your progress. Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers” (1 Tim. 4:15-16).**

Paul, of course, practiced what he preached. Realizing that he was about to die for his faith he wrote: **“For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time has come for my departure. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day – and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing” (2 Tim. 4:6-8).**

EVERY “WITNESS” IN HEAVEN AND ON EARTH KNEW THAT PAUL SPOKE THE TRUTH. HE WAS FAITHFUL UNTIL DEATH! HE FINISHED THE RACE AND KEPT THE FAITH! LET US ALSO DO THE SAME!