

## THE BON AIR PULPIT

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Scripture: *Hebrews 12: 1-3*

Sermon: ***This is Your Time***

During the month of November we have been walking through what are called the great challenges in the book of Hebrews. There are passages of Scripture that challenge us to live for God in a more acceptable way. People who have read the book of Hebrews understand that the eleventh chapter is the most memorable one. It is called the "Role Call of Faith". It lists for us great people of God who have made such a contribution in their generation. And as you come to the end of that chapter you come to what is called one of the great "therefores". Eleven times in the book there's that conjunction "therefore." In light of all that you have heard, and in light of all of what you have received, this is what you are to do. And so, in chapter twelve, in the first couple of verses, it tells us that it is our opportunity to live for God as we should. How are we to live so that we can make a contribution? How can we live so that we can make a difference in our time? In recognition of this great contribution that people have made in the past, how can we make a contribution in our own life now?

So, with that, let me read for you this great challenge for us, chapter twelve, verse one: *Therefore, we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses...* The idea is being in a great arena, and here are all these people who've gone on before us, and now they're watching us to see how we are living. The scripture says *Let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. Let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him, endured the cross, scorning its shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.*

A great Christian historian was reviewing the religious history of the country of England. In it he talked of periods where outstanding Christian leaders began to emerge that affected not only their nation, but literally the whole world. He talked about times of spiritual fervor and spiritual enthusiasm. He talked of times in which great organizations for Christ were founded. As he came to the close of his lecture, one of the people who was listening raised their hand and said, "I noticed

that there are periods that you omitted. Is that because of the length of time that you had to speak? Why didn't you mention this period of time?" And the professor thought for a moment, and then he said, "Well, no, those were the times that the people lived off of the capital of the past. They did not think about making a contribution for the future. These were times that do not count."

Those words have always haunted me--that people would live off of the capital of the past. They would take and become selfish little clods who never thought about what they could do to make a difference. The words, "never thought about making a contribution to others", implies a poor imitation of humanity that wants to live only for themselves and never think about what they can pass on to others. These were times that did not count. Now the passage of Scripture I have read tells you about times that people made count. They made such a difference that their names are in the Bible, men and women who lived for God and who served God. The question that runs over all our minds is this: "Is that the way we are living, or are we just a part of the people who don't count?"

This passage of Scripture tells you how you can live to make a difference. How you can live so you're not just the ordinary, not just taking and not giving, or just taking and not leaving, but really making a difference for God. I hope that as you meditate on this passage of Scripture that there will well up inside of you a hunger, so that you will want to live to such a degree that your life will really count for God and for others. The writer of Hebrews neatly outlines three things you're going to have to understand to do it.

The first one is this: *You're going to have to understand the obstacles you face.* Every person who gets ready to undertake a great task knows that there are difficulties that are in front of them, so they outline what they are going to be. If you are on a football team and you're getting ready to play another team, you're going to study what their strengths and their weaknesses are. If you're getting ready to go on a rafting trip down a river, you've got to know where the rapids are. If you're getting ready to climb a mountain, you've got to know where the precipices are. And if you get ready to live the Christian life, you've got to know where the difficulties are or else you'll keep running into them.

There are really two broad categories of difficulties. *Category #1: There are things that hinder you.* This is a sports analogy. The sport of the Middle East during

biblical time was track and field. The great arenas that were erected during this time were for people who could run and throw things further. The way the people used to train if they ran is that they would take weights and strap them around their legs. They understood that as they practiced with those weights, even as we understand today, it developed their muscles. Then on the day of the race, they would take these off and it would leave the impression that their feet were lighter and with the improved muscle strength, they were able to run faster and win the race. Now, weights are very good, except, you don't keep them on your legs when you run the day of the race. You understand that they were good for a time, good for a purpose, but if you try to run the race with the weights on, you're going to lose. So, what all of us need to understand is that there are some things that are good in their place, good in their time, but they need to be set aside when the time comes to win a race.

An illustration in the Bible is in the fourth chapter of John. Every morning women in the Bible would go out to get their water. They would have great clay pots and they would pick them up, put them on their heads, walk down, and fill them up with water. Then they'd pick them back up, put them on top of their heads and they'd go home. One day, one of the ladies was down at the well getting her water when she met Jesus Christ. Jesus revealed unto her who he was, and she was just ecstatic. The Bible says that she went running back into town to tell people she had met the Messiah. The Scripture also says, "but she left her water pots." Well, of course, if you're getting ready to go tell the most exciting news you've ever heard, you don't reach around, pick up a big jug full of water and go running into town. You leave what you have because you understand that something else is more important.

Now in every one of our lives there are things that were good in their time, good for a certain purpose. But if you're going to win your race you're going to have to determine those things that are hindering you today, and you're going to have to put them away. The problem is, they're not bad things. They're just not the best things. They were good for a moment, good for a time, but they're not good now and if you are going to make the progress you need to make, there are some things you are going to have to put aside. What you're going to have to do in your Christian life is determine those things that are hindering you from really winning your race.

Not only do individuals have them, but churches always have their water pots. I mean, "You know the

water pots have always been here. Grandma brought those water pots." Every water pot has its champion. "You can't do without that. If you do without that, then...." But every church also has the challenge of recognizing that what you've done in the past may not help you to win the race today. There are some things that you may need to set aside, because, if you do not, you're not going to be light enough to go on and win the battle. And in every church there are always individuals who, every time you mention a change or a difference, they say, "You know we have to carry that water pot." But the difficulty is that if you try to carry every water pot to every race, you're not going to win. And you need to determine how you can lighten yourself, so that you can go on and do what needs to be done.

Virginia Baptists, of which this church is a vital member, have just done a survey of the religious life of Virginia. What they have found is that the Christian community in Virginia has not grown percentage wise in the last 15 years. Now if you were head of a giant organization and somebody came to you and told you, "For the last 15 years your sales have not increased at all. You were flat for 15 years! Something is going to have to change." But you see everybody wants to hold onto his or her water pot. People say, "We've always done it this way." In your Christian life, there are some things you're going to have to examine, and set aside, if you're going to win the race.

The other thing is true. Some things are good for training, but they're not good for running. Let me tell you one of the big problems you will always face. You will make a decision in your life, maybe even this morning, that one of the things you're going to do is, know the Scriptures more. Of course you would hear me say, "Everybody needs to know the Scripture more." But let me tell you what the problem is. You can spend a lifetime wanting to know the Scripture more, and never understand that the purpose of knowing the Scripture is so you can share it with somebody else. If you're not careful, what you'll keep doing is spend your life training to do a task, and never get around to doing it.

People in business understand this. There are millions of training opportunities for your employees. Every week there's something else, if you go to the Internet, if you go to this..., and if you're not careful you can send your employees to a hundred training

experiences. There's only one problem. They're not there to take care of the customers. You can train and train, but never get the job done. In the Christian life, the same hindrance is there. You can train and train, but you never get the job done. Its like somebody training and training to play a football game, but never showing up for the game. Do you understand that in your Christian life there are always hindrances that are there, and if you don't know they're there, you're just going to spend your life spinning your wheels and never get anything done?

The second thing the writer of Hebrews said you've got to face is *not only things that hinder you, but also the things that will harm you*. He said, "the sin that does so easily beset you." Now the amazing thing about most of the sins that you and I confront is that they're not hard to do. In fact, they're very easy to do. We almost fall into them. You do them before you even realize they are done. An example of this is, in our home, we always eat very healthy, except at Thanksgiving. We kill the fatted turkey, and we really put it on. Our children were in over the holidays, so my wife fixed a German chocolate cake, a sweet potato pie, and somebody was nice enough to bring us by some other desserts. Last night I was kind of checking out things before I went to bed. Sweet potato pie does not taste good unless it has some whipped cream on it. I wanted to make sure I got my share of that. And that chess pie, that lady brought by, I really did appreciate that. And our daughter-in-law came and brought some cookies. I wanted to make sure I didn't hurt her feelings, so I ate one of those. The grandkids are into Oreos now, so I got a little Oreo before I went to bed. Then I topped it off with some ice cream with some of those M&M's on top. Was that hard to do? It was one of the easiest things I've ever done. I didn't have to work at it, just did what was natural. It was there, and I didn't think about it. The doctor that I go to was in the previous service, so I probably shouldn't have shared all this. I'm supposed to get my cholesterol checked soon. I didn't even think about my doctor. Didn't worry about it. Just did it.

Do you understand, you don't have to wake up every day and say I'm going to be mean. You don't have to say I'm going to throw my fist in the face of God. Just live normally. Then all of the sudden you realize you haven't spent time in prayer. You haven't spent time being kind. You haven't spent time being helpful. You haven't spent time looking out for hurting people. You come to understand that if you're going to make a difference, there are these words: discipline, honesty and accountability to help us deal with the obstacles that are there. I'm not going to win the race unless I understand there are difficulties to getting there.

The next thing the writer said is this: *We all need a different attitude in life*. He said, if you run your race, you've got to run it with perseverance. Perseverance is when you run into a difficulty, you have an attitude that overcomes it and keeps going. When I run into a problem, I'm not going to let the problem stop me. I'm going to go on.

There is in the drug world a phrase that really has come out of the athletic world. The phrase is "a monkey on my back." People who are addicted will often say, "I have a monkey on my back." Let me tell you what that means. People who run long distances know that you can run and feel real good for awhile, but there is a wall that is there, and after a while, you're going to hit it. When you hit it, you don't feel like you can pick your feet up one more time. Your lungs are screaming for air. The easiest thing in the world to do is just go over to the side and sit down. You literally feel a monkey has gotten on your back. You feel like you're carrying something on your back, and you just can't go on.

Perseverance says, regardless of what monkey comes on my back, I am going to continue on. It is recognizing that if you're going to play, many times you're going to have to play hurt. And if you're not willing to play hurt, then you're going to stop and never get where you're going. The reason that many marriages get in trouble is that we're not willing to stay married playing hurt. If it doesn't go our way, then all of the sudden we bail out.

In the Christian life, we're tempted when the difficulties come to just bail out. The biblical writer says if you're going to run, you're going to have to run with your lungs screaming for air, when your legs are leaden and your muscles are cramping, but you're going to go on, and you're going to get the job done. The reason that some people accomplish their goals and some don't is that when some people run into difficulty, they quit. The people who make a difference in this life and the Christian life are inspired when difficulties come and they are able to go further. Difficulties can be like a mattress: it can smother you or you can sleep on top of it. You determine the attitude, and you determine how you're going to be able to do it.

Let me remind you about a beautiful passage of Scripture in the Bible. It says that when the Holy Spirit comes into our life two things will happen. It says, "Young men will see visions, and old men will dream dreams." A vision is something that you see that is going to be. When people in the Bible said, "I have seen a

vision," they had seen something that God was getting ready to reveal. That's a vision. A dream is something that can be, if you work on it.

All right, put them together. Martin Luther King, Jr., did not say, "I have a vision." He said, "I have a dream." If it's something you work on, it can be. When the Holy Spirit comes, young men shall see visions. And the gift to young people is, you will have wisdom, understanding, and insight far beyond your years. All men, many times, want to sit down and take it easy, and say I've done my job. But when the Spirit comes, all men shall dream dreams. They will say, "It's not the time to stop; it's not the time to run away from difficulties; it's not the time to take it easy; it's time to dream what can be."

When the Spirit of God comes into your life, what happens to you is you'll begin to dream dreams. Difficulties and problems will come, and all kinds of things will happen in your life, but perseverance is the gift of God that will be in your life to help you keep going. I am heartsick every week when I hear of people who give up too quickly. You remember Churchill, in one of his great speeches, stood in front of all the coal miners in England and said, "Never, never, never give up", and then he turned around and walked off. It's one of the great speeches in history. "Never, never, never give up." In Jesus Christ, never give up. You'll never make it to the end if you give up.

The third thing the writer of Hebrews said is this: *You've got to face the obstacles, you've got to have the attitude, and you've got to have the inspiration*. The inspiration of your life is Jesus. If Jesus went to the cross to die for your sins, surely you can keep on keeping on. One of the ladies who was in the earlier service gave me a book. I commend it to you. It's called [Their Blood Cries Out](#). It's the history of the Christian martyrs of this generation. When you read it you cry, get mad, and also get encouraged.

There are people this morning that are meeting around the world, who wonder if the knock on the door is going to send them to prison. There are people in this generation that have literally been crucified for their faith. There are people who have given up everything they have for the cause of Christ.

Now I don't think anybody in this room is going to be in this book. I personally think things are going to get tougher for Christians, but you probably won't be a martyr for your faith. What you're going to hear are things like this, "Well, if you're not going to drink, you can't be in our

group." And you may not be as popular in high school as some other people because you won't go along with everybody else. It may be that you won't marry that fellow because he says, "If you're not going to sleep with me, I don't want anything to do with you." And it may be, to stay true to your faith, you may not get married when you thought you would. It may be that when you're at work somebody will say, "If you don't know how to go along, you can't get along." And it may be that you may have a conscience crisis where you're going to have to determine who you're going to live for.

It may be that you might be like the little lady out in the midwest whose husband died. She made all her living by renting rooms to people. A couple walked in and said they wanted to rent a room. She was audacious enough to ask, "Are you married?" They said, "No." And she said, "I don't want people living in my house who are living together and not married." They took her to court and the Supreme Court said she had to rent that room to those people. She's now out of the housing business because she said, "I can't be a part of that."

That may be what you have to do. It may be that you're one of the ones that are called a bigot and intolerant because you would dare question the moral status of someone's lifestyle. The question you need to ask yourself is this: What kind of price is on your head? What kind of price is on your conscience? What are you willing to sell out for? Do you understand that you're never going to make it if you sell out too cheaply. And the only way that you're going to make it is to look to Jesus, and say, "Jesus, my, look what you did for me. I surely ought to be able to do this for you."

Let me go back to my historian. Some people live off of the capital of the past. They make no contribution to the future. Those times don't count. I hold in my hand a list of men and women who made a difference because their faith was the driving dream of their life. Do you have that same kind of driving dream, that same passion, that same desire, that you're going to live for God and make a difference regardless of what happens? I hope under God that you'll determine that that's what you're going to be.