

**Jesus: Our Great High Priest Forever**  
**(Week 23)**  
**Hebrews 11:30-12:2**  
**"The Cloud"**

**Introduction**

Now, I'm not in the least bit a "techy" person. I was actually in my late forties before I even knew how to send a text message! I'm not on Facebook (and never will be), and I certainly do not have the slightest idea of what the people all around are taking about half the time with this social media stuff; ie. Twitter and Instagram etcetera, etcetera. My wife was trying her best to explain to me not very long ago what "the cloud" was. That was a great conversation. As best as I can understand it, apparently there is this place somewhere, in the "atmospheric realm" of the internet, that serves as a storage unit of sorts for all of the data in our so called "smartphones". I don't really understand it, and quite frankly, I don't really care to.

That being said, the writer of *Hebrews* speaks of another type of "cloud" that serves as a reminder of all the people, who have lived by faith. He calls them a "cloud of witnesses" (**12:1**), and he spends a great amount of detail in the **eleventh chapter** of this book describing for us just who all resides within this "cloud". The list is extraordinary. Over the past few weeks, we have examined the lives of just a few of the v.i.p. members included in this great "cloud of witnesses. Today, we will look at even more.

When **chapter eleven** begins, the writer methodically points directly to the lives of Abel, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, and finally, Moses. These men are each singled out with precision, with something being said to describe each man's own individual act (or acts) of faith. When the writer gets us through the life of Moses, however, he takes a new approach. It's more of a "shotgun blast" style rather than a single shot rifle, (for those of you who understand the reference). From **verses 11:30-40**, we are given an incredible summary of the many lives of the faithful followers of God throughout the history of scripture. I am reminded here of a friend of mine, who often describes the receiving of such overwhelming amounts of information as being likened to "drinking from a firehose"! There is for us a great deal of historical data covered in these eleven verses of scripture, and to go into an exhaustive study of each person or event that is mentioned here could produce six months of Sunday sermons. Suffice to say, that we are going to quickly summarize what is given here, just as the writer intended.

Though I would highly recommend for every believer to further investigate each of these people and events in his or her own private study time, we shall today just hit the "highlights, as it were. For just as the preacher has said in his own words, we haven't enough time for more than this (**vs. 32**).

**"By faith, the walls of Jericho fell down, after being marched around by the Israelites for seven days. By faith, Rahab the prostitute welcomed the spies in peace and didn't perish with those who disobeyed. And what more can I say? Time is too short for me to tell about Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel, and the prophets, who by faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions, quenched the raging of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, gained strength in weakness, became mighty in battle, and put foreign armies to flight."**  
**Hebrews 11:30-31**

While many names are mentioned in these verses, many are not. The writer speaks of the miraculous battle of Jericho, but Joshua's name is omitted. Only Rehab is mentioned by name. The mention of the shutting of the lion's mouths is no doubt a reference to Daniel, but he is included only as one of "the prophets (**vs. 32**)". Suffice to say, there are many great people of faith, who belong to this "great cloud of witnesses". Some performed miracles, while others suffered intensely because of their faith.

**"Women received their dead, raised to life again. Other people were tortured, not accepting release, so that they might gain a better resurrection. Others experienced mocking and scourging, as well as bonds of imprisonment. They were stoned, they**

**were sawed in two, they wandered about in sheepskins, in goatskins, destitute, afflicted, and mistreated. The world was not worthy of them. They wandered in deserts and on mountains, hiding in caves and holes in the ground. All these were approved through their faith, but they did not receive what was promised, since God had provided something better for us, so that they would not be made perfect without us."**  
**Hebrews 11:32-40**

So you see, some saw great wonders, because of their faith, while others saw great suffering, also, because of their faith. Isaiah was one of the great prophets, the one who gave such great insight into Jesus, The Messiah, who was to come, such as:

**"For a child will be born to us, a Son will be given to us, and the government will be on His shoulders. He will be named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace."**  
**Isaiah 9:6**

Yes, **that** Isaiah, was placed inside a hollow tree and sawed in two according to Jewish tradition. Not everyone got a pass on suffering just because they believed, but all who believe are held in high esteem by God Himself, and that is worth it all. Just imagine what it will be like to hear him say, **"Well done, good and faithful servant."** (Matthew 25:23).

Many faithful men and women have come and gone, not seeing the promises of God in their own lifetimes, but nonetheless, they clung to His Word **by faith**. And God has seen to it that the perfection that they longed for included us as well (**vs. 40**). The word the writer uses here that is translated "perfect" (*teleioo*) actually means "completed" or "fulfilled". Jesus used a form of this word on the cross, when He declared **"It Is Finished"** (John 19:30). So you see, the very things that these faithful witnesses looked forward to were fulfilled... for us! Their hope has been perfected in "our time". The promised Deliverer came. He died to set us free. He rose from the dead to offer us the promise of a better resurrection, and He is leading us to our promised inheritance.

There are two things that we must do, since we have been surrounded by this "great cloud of witnesses", who gave everything to see what we have now been given. We must: 1. Remember those who have gone before us, and 2. Fix our eyes on The ONE, Who now goes before us. Allow me to explain.

### **The Ones Who Have Gone Before Us**

**"Therefore, since we also have such a large cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us lay aside every hindrance and the sin that so easily ensnares us. Let us run with endurance the race that lies before us..."**  
**Hebrews 12:1**

This is an incredible verse of scripture! What the writer of *Hebrews* says here has often been misinterpreted. It seems that he is saying that since all of these great people of faith, who have gone before us, are now sitting up in heaven watching us, then we should "run our race of faith" so that they may see and approve. It is as if we are in some great arena and the "spectators" of faith are watching us compete. Though this may sound like what the preacher is describing, I do not believe this to be the case at all. The word that is translated "witnesses" is *"martoos"* in the Greek, and it is where we get our word "martyr". You see, these people are not up in heaven "witnessing us". They have run their race (lived their lives) in such a way that they bear witness **to** us. We see what they have done, and we are encouraged to do likewise. This is the very reason that God has seen to it that their stories have been told in His Word. This enables us to examine their lives of faith and to emulate them. So you see, they are not witnessing us, but rather, **we** are witnessing **them**!

And that, my friends, is the reason that we are to preach God's Word to His people in its entirety. In the scriptures, we are given example after example to follow, if we decide that we want to believe God and join in this "race" to bring Him glory. We look at men like Daniel, who was taken away from his

homeland in chains. He was made a eunuch to serve in the kingdom of Babylon. If anyone ever had cause to complain about his circumstances being unfair, it was Daniel. But, what did he choose to do rather than complain? He chose to live by faith. This is why his life was so amazing. When his enemies tried to destroy him for his faith by having him thrown to the lions, God miraculously saved him from death! He came out of that hole in the ground very much alive... by faith. That is a picture of the death and resurrection of Christ by the way, in case you missed it! Even though Jesus (like Daniel) was innocent, He faced death **for us**, and He came up out of that tomb very much alive.

Daniel has borne witness for us that living by faith will be rewarded in the end. SO what should we do as a result? We should look to Daniel's "witness" and do what he did. Daniel didn't allow sin or any other encumbrance to keep him from running his race of faith. When we see the witness of Daniel, we should be inspired to do likewise:

**"...let us lay aside every hindrance and the sin that so easily ensnares us."**

**Hebrews 12:1**

What does the writer of *Hebrews* mean by this statement? Simply this, we need to get rid of anything that keeps us from running our race of faith well. There are two things that will slow down a world class runner: excess baggage and obstacles in his path. There are two things that will keep a child of God from running a good race of faith: hindrances and sin. A hindrance isn't necessarily a bad thing, it is just anything that keeps us from running well. For example, if an olympic athlete eats too much good food and gains a few pounds, it will slow him down when he runs. Even good food, in excess, can produce a bad result (fat). Can I get a witness?

Now let's look at a "hindrance" from a spiritual standpoint. For the sake of an illustration, let's say that you are a believer, and you have a great job. There is nothing wrong with work, in fact, we are commanded in scripture to "get a job" (**2 Thessalonians 3:10**). But, if your job keeps you from running a good race of faith, then it has become a hindrance. Imagine if your job requires you to behave in a manner that is unethical and goes against the Word of God, or it requires so much of your time that you have been rendered unable to serve God. Then your job, which is a very good thing to have, has become a hindrance. We are called to **"Seek first the kingdom of God"** above all else. If we do that, then Jesus promises to meet our needs (**Matthew 6:33**). If your job keeps you from running a "kingdom first" kind of race, then that job has become a hindrance. Daniel could have just done his job and obeyed every order that the king of Babylon gave him, but he chose instead to seek first the Kingdom of God. Daniel has borne witness to us, exactly what it means to "lay aside every hindrance". We see Daniel's faith, and we are encouraged to do likewise.

Of course the other thing that will keep us from running well is obvious. It is sin. Notice how the writer of *Hebrews* doesn't say "sins", but rather "the sin". You see, as we have studied before, I am convinced that every believer has a specific sin that wants to pull them down. Yes, we all sin in many ways, but there always seems to be this certain area of weakness that is a reoccurring stumbling block for everyone who would choose to run the race of faith. My weakness may not be the same as yours, but rest assured, we **both** have at least one. Do you recognize "the sin" in your life that so easily ensnares you? If you want to run the race of faith well, if you want to follow in the footsteps of this cloud of witnesses that has gone before us, then my friend you must deal firmly with **that particular sin**. It is **the sin** that so easily ensnares you, it trips you up and keeps you from running well. You must, by faith, get the victory over this sin, if you wish to run well. If you want to see how it is done, then look to the example of the cloud of witnesses. They will show you how it's done! And by the way, "the cloud" is being added to every day. There are some pretty awesome "modern day" faith-racers sitting around you in this very room. So, not only do we have the examples of people like Daniel, but of those all around us, who are running a great race of faith even as we speak.

Would you like to know one of the reasons that I became a pastor? Many years ago, when I was in my twenties, Sandi and I attended Sunday School at a small Baptist church. Our teachers were John and Kaye Thomas. They would not be considered charismatic, not great and powerful orators, but rather, they were just two believers, who served faithfully in the church. I can still remember one particular Sunday, when Kaye was just talking about having her daily "quiet time" alone with God. It seemed that at

the start of every day, Kaye had scheduled an “appointment” to meet with God in prayer and Bible study. I had actually never even heard of this before, though I had been in church most of my life! I sat there thinking, “If she can do that... I can do that!” So, as a result, I started having a daily quiet time of devotion with The LORD. I was **amazed** at how much this changed my whole life. The God of the universe actually began speaking to me through His Word! It was in these daily sessions with God, that I was called to preach. So you see, God used Kaye Thomas to bear witness to me. It is because of her, and many others like her “in the cloud”, that helped me to get where I am today in my race of faith! God has put some amazing people in the cloud. They are the faithful followers of Christ, who have gone before us. Witness what they have done, and do likewise!

### The One Who Now Goes Before Us

**“Keeping our eyes on Jesus, the Source and Perfecter of our faith. For the joy that lay before Him, He endured the cross, despising the shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.”**  
**Hebrews 12:2**

Ok, so that verse is pretty amazing too! It reminds us that not only are we to look at those who have gone before us, but also, to keep our eyes fixed firmly upon the One Who **goes** before us. Jesus is both the Source and Perfecter of our faith. The Greek that is translated “source”, we have seen before. The word is “archegos”, and it means simply “pioneer”. In **Hebrews 2:10**, Jesus is described as the “archegos” (pioneer) of our salvation. He blazed a trail into the Holy of Holies, so we could enter into the presence of God. Now, He is seen as the “pioneer of faith”. It is Christ Who started faith in the world, and it is He Who will see it to **Perfection** (completion). Jesus is our faith guide. It was He Who assembled the “great cloud of witnesses”, and it is He Who will see to it that all of us will reach our final destination. So, you see, Jesus is both the beginning and the end of faith!

Think about it in this way. Everyone, who had ever lived by faith, is part of a single chain. We are connected all the way back to Abel and his sacrifice of faith. Everyone, who has faith in Christ, is a link in this long chain. But there is one link that is different from all the rest. Jesus is that link in the chain. He is both the first link and the last. We are all connected to one source, and that is Christ. He was the first link in the chain, and as the chain makes its unbroken circle, He serves as the last link as well. He is the pioneer **and** the perfecter, the first and the last, the beginning and the end! Apart from Him, we will surely fail. If we are to succeed in this race of faith, then we must be fully focused upon Christ. Every link in the chain, when they were at their very best in faith, was transformed into the image of Christ. Simply put, when we examine all the great “heroes of the faith”, they all resemble one person... Jesus.

Remember what I told you last week, “When you walk in faith, people will always see Jesus in you.” This is the natural result of a life lived with “eyes fixed upon Christ”.

**“Do not be conformed to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may discern what is the good, pleasing, and perfect will of God.”**  
**Romans 12:2**

Fixing our eyes upon Jesus will change us from the inside out. We will be transformed, and our lives lived by faith will glorify God. People will begin to see more and more of Him in us. We will be on a journey of faith, that will ultimately bring us into a shining mirror image of Christ Himself. Can you just imagine how glorious it will be, when all of God’s children are a perfect reflection of Him? That is where we are headed, if we remain linked to the chain my friends. So let us remember to look to those who have **gone** before, as we also remember to look to the One Who **goes** before. He will lead us all the way home. He is the pioneer and perfecter of faith! I want to be a part of the great cloud of witnesses. I want to cast aside every hindrance and the sin that so easily entangles me. I want to fix my eyes on Jesus, the Pioneer and Perfecter of our faith. I want to do these things so completely, that the world may see Him... in me. How about you?

And **ALL** of God’s people said... **TRUTH!!!**