

“Faith’s Clarity & Encouragement”

Hebrews 12:1a

March 24, 2019

INTRO:

- Let me ask... *Are you living out Victory in Jesus?*
- What does that mean? What’s it really look like?
- How would YOU answer & share?

We ALL desperately need this victory in Jesus...

- Our world’s **cross-continental cultures** are **broken**.
- Our **countries, cities & communities** are **broken**.
- Our **citizens & even our children** are **broken**.
- Our **Christ-claiming churches** are **broken**.
- Our **“Christ-less Christianity”** is **broken**.

- Today you’ll see the **tight weave** of God’s Word...
- Today we begin a new series: **Victory in Jesus!**

T/S: *Victory in Jesus begins when God’s **grace** leads us to **fear Him, love Him, and obey Him**. In short, Victory in Jesus comes when we **put our saving faith** in the miraculous Truth & Love of the gospel of Jesus Christ*

VIDEO: *“Exhortation of Exhortations 1”*

INTRO:

- That was 12 weeks ago, closing Hebrews ch.10
- The video closed ch.10 & opens ch.12 of Hebrews
 - **one Message, one MESSIAH, one Mission!**

BIG IDEA:

*Victory begins with God's
charity & clarity!*

PREVIEW:

- God's Point
- God's People
- God's Presence
- God's Power

TEXT:

Hebrews 12:1 (ESV)

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight/encumbrance, and sin which so easily entangles/clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us,

Our present verse is a call to constancy in the Christian profession; it is an exhortation unto steadfastness in the Christian life; it is a pressing appeal for making personal holiness our supreme business and quest.

I. Victory in God's POINT

"Therefore, since..."

See these words **Grammatically, Theologically & Practically**

➤ Let's look at this **GRAMMATICALLY...**

- See truly over-looked (vs. hidden) treasure
- We have "**2-pointers**" pointing at something
 - "**Therefore**" points at... ch.10:26-39
 - "**Since**" points at... ch.11:1-40

➤ Let's look at this **THEOLOGICALLY...**

- "**Therefore**" reinforces God's **warning**
- "**Since**" reinforces God's **encouragement**
- **Together they reinforce God's EXHORTATION!**
- Connect Hebrews 12:1a to 10:24-39...

24 And *let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works....* 26 *For if we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins,* [L][SEP] 27 *but a fearful expectation of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries.* [L][SEP] 28 *Anyone who has set aside the law of Moses dies without mercy on the evidence of two or three witnesses.* [L][SEP] 29 *How much worse punishment, do you think, will be deserved by the one who has trampled underfoot the Son of God, and has profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has outraged the Spirit of grace?* [L][SEP] 30 *For we know him who said, "Vengeance is mine; I will repay." And again, "The Lord will judge his people."* [L][SEP] 31 *It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God...* 36 *For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God you may receive what is promised.* [L][SEP] 37 *For, "Yet a little while, and the coming one will come and will not delay;* [L][SEP] 38 *but my righteous one shall live*

by faith, and if he shrinks back, my soul has no pleasure in him.” ^L_{SEP} 39 *But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith and preserve their souls.*

VIDEO: “Exhortation of Exhortations 1b”

- Let’s look at this **PRACTICALLY...**
 - Now you know who is being referenced...
 - Now you know that Hebrews 12 opens with God’s way to work thru His warning...

T/S: Having set the proper context... let’s continue to work our way thru God’s charity & clarity so we can get to God’s encouragement...

II. Victory in God’s PEOPLE

“Therefore, since we are surrounded...”

- Understanding & defining “we” is **CRITICAL!**
- “we” **CAN**-be for God’s family **OR** God’s furnace

VIDEO: “Exhortation of Exhortations 2”

In [Hebrews 11](#) we have had described at length many aspects and characteristics of the life of faith. There we saw that a life of faith is an intensely practical thing, consisting of very much more than day-dreaming, or being regaled with joyous emotions, or even resting in orthodox views of the truth. By faith Noah built an ark, Abraham separated from his idolatrous neighbors and gained a rich inheritance, Moses forsook Egypt and became leader of Israel's hosts. By faith the Red Sea was crossed, Jericho captured, Goliath slain, the mouths of lions were closed, the violence of fire was quenched. A spiritual faith, then, is not a passive thing, but an active, energetic, vigorous, and fruitful one. The same line of thought is continued in the passage which is now before us...

➤ **“surrounded”**

- You NEED to know who's surrounding you!
 - Family fighting for God?
 - Phonies fighting against God?
 - **Fellow warriors or ferocious wolves?**
 - Beware the uncertain...
 - **Demas** went from “in” to “out”
 - Even Francis Chan raises concerns

VIDEO: *“Exhortation of Exhortations 3”*

- No matter what Christian... **be encouraged!**
 - Our King **Jesus has overcome the world**
 - **Remember Elisha's prayer...**
 - You will be surrounded by evil...
 - But the evil will be surrounded too

III. Victory in God's PRESENCE

*“Therefore, since we are surrounded
by so great a cloud...”*

- Here comes God's encouragement :-)
- **“great”** speaks to (2) realities simultaneously...
 - **Quantity**
 - God & His Word are speaking of saints...
 - God & His Word... of all the saved souls.
 - **Quality**
 - God & His Word are **validating** here...
 - God & His Word imply **victory** here...
 - God & His Word have **“witnessed”** here.

VIDEO: *“Hold On 45 Finale”*

- **“cloud”**
 - This word is loaded & pregnant w/ meaning
 - Defined as a **“throng”** by some:
 - High quantity of densely unified...
 - **Christians in the kingdom are akin to drops of moisture in a cloud...**
 - See the theological implications & imagery:

- It continues ch.11's growing list:
 - Single Christian examples...
 - The "fireworks finale"
 - Now a limitless "cloud"
- **Unified like Koinonia**
- United in form & function like **Ekklesia**
 - See Jude's warning if otherwise...
 - See "**homothoomadon**" in action...
- This "cloud" is like God's body, family, quilt!

Don't miss God's contrast here between the "even if" cloud/church vs. the "ya but" cowards & crowds!

VIDEO: *"Exhortation of Exhortations 5"*

- No true Christian is ever alone! Amen.

IV. Victory in God's **POWER**

*"Therefore,
since we are surrounded by so great a cloud
of witnesses..."*

- These are those witnesses that have received God's commending & affirming witness...
- These are not "spectators" looking down at us, but rather, victors looking up at Christ, and thereby offering us encouragement & inspiration
- These are the mMm missionaries & martyrs...
- *These are the faith-filled & faithful family of God that have headed home to heaven ahead of us!*
- **These are God's trophies on His mantle of grace!**
- These are the eternal brothers & sisters of grace!
- These are our brothers & sisters in Christ!

We can run as well as they did. It has nothing to do with how we compare with them, but in how our God compares with theirs. - John MacArthur

CLOSE:

Friends, as Hebrews continues to call us back to a championing commitment as ambassadors of Christ, I pray that your potential victory & faith in Jesus was fueled today by His clarifying encouragement & relentless truth in love.

I want to pray & leave you with a closing ***exhortation of exhortations...***

Let's Pray!

VIDEO: *"Exhortation of Exhortations 4"*

Additional Study Notes:

12:1 “Since we also have such a large cloud of witnesses surrounding us . . . Let us run with endurance the race that lies before us.” The footrace of the Olympic Games is an illustration of the Christian life. We are directed to the spectators who throng the sides of the course. The former chapter gives us the names of many of these glorious bearers of testimony, who all by faith achieved great wonders and so bore witness to the truth of God. Thousands upon thousands who have run this race before us and have attained their crowns watch us from their heavenly seats. Angels and principalities and powers and hosts redeemed by blood have gathered to observe the glorious spectacle of people agonizing for holiness and putting forth their utmost strength to copy the Lord Jesus. This race is worth running, this race for the great prize. If there is any spiritual life and gracious strength in us, let us put it forth today—for patriarchs, prophets, saints, martyrs, and apostles look down from heaven upon us.

- CSB Spurgeon Study Bible.

Therefore:

- This conjunction connects what follows to/with ch.10... **NOT** ch.11
 - Don't ever forget... the broadest CONTEXT we see, read, & personally experience when we refer to “the church” is a tri-fold pool of people:
 - Lost souls who know they are lost
 - Most are just visiting the church...
 - Others are trying to convince people they are saved...
 - Some for social benefits...
 - Some for emotional benefits...
 - Some for physical benefits...

- Some as wolves in sheep's clothing
 - Lost souls who think they are saved
 - Saved souls who worship & witness
- Connect Hebrews 12:1a to 10:24-39...

Hebrews 10:24-39 (ESV) ^[L]_[SEP]24 And *let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works,* ^[L]_[SEP]25 not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.

^[L]_[SEP]26 *For if we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins,* ^[L]_[SEP]27 *but a fearful expectation of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries.* ^[L]_[SEP]28 Anyone who has set aside the law of Moses dies without mercy on the evidence of two or three witnesses. ^[L]_[SEP]29 *How much worse punishment, do you think, will be deserved by the one who has trampled underfoot the Son of God, and has profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has outraged the Spirit of grace?* ^[L]_[SEP]30 For we know him who said, “Vengeance is mine; I will repay.” And again, “The Lord will judge his people.” ^[L]_[SEP]31 *It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.* ^[L]_[SEP]32 But recall the former days when, after you were enlightened, you endured a hard struggle with sufferings, ^[L]_[SEP]33 sometimes being publicly exposed to reproach and affliction, and sometimes being partners with those so treated. ^[L]_[SEP]34 For you had compassion on those in prison, and you joyfully accepted the plundering of your property, since you knew that you yourselves had a better possession and an abiding one. ^[L]_[SEP]35 Therefore do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward. ^[L]_[SEP]36 *For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God you may receive what is promised.* ^[L]_[SEP]37 *For, “Yet a little while, and the coming one will come and will not delay; ^[L]_[SEP]38 but my righteous one shall live by faith, and if he shrinks back, my soul has no pleasure in him.”* ^[L]_[SEP]39 *But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith and preserve their souls.*

- Ch.11 is brought in by the next word: “since”
- This conjunction will connect to:
 - Two primer statements:
 - Let us also lay aside every weight AND
 - Let us also lay aside every sin

Verse 1. *Wherefore.* In view of what has been said in the previous chapter.

Seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses. The apostle represents those to whom he had referred in the previous chapter as looking on to witness the efforts which Christians make, and the manner in which they live. **There is allusion here, doubtless, to the ancient games.** A great multitude of spectators usually occupied the circular seats in the amphitheatre, from which they could easily behold the combatants. **1 Corinthians 9:24**, seq.

In like manner the apostle represents Christians as encompassed with the multitude of worthies to whom he had referred in the previous chapter. It cannot be fairly inferred from this that he means to say that all those ancient worthies were *actually* looking at the conduct of Christians, and saw their conflicts. **It is a figurative representation, such as is common, and means that we ought to act as if they were in sight, and cheered us on.**

How far the spirits of the just who are departed from this world are permitted to behold what is done on earth-if at all-is not revealed in the Scriptures.

The phrase "a cloud of witnesses," means many witnesses, or a number so great that they seem to be

a cloud. The comparison of a multitude of persons to a cloud is common in the classic writers.

See Homer's Il. iv. 274, xxiii. 133; Statius, i. 340, and other instances adduced in Wetstein,

- Barnes' Notes on the New Testament.

The Demands of Faith

([Hebrews 12:1](#))

Our present verse is a call to constancy in the Christian profession; it is an exhortation unto steadfastness in the Christian life; it is a pressing appeal for making personal holiness our supreme business and quest.

In substance our text is parallel with such verses as [Matthew 16:24](#), [Romans 6:13](#), [2 Corinthians 7:1](#), [Philippians 3:12-14](#), [Titus 2:12](#), [1 Peter 2:9-12](#). This summarization of the Christian's twofold duty is given again and again in the Scriptures: the duty of mortification and of vivification, the putting off of the "old man" and the putting on of the "new man" ([Eph. 4:22-24](#)).

The opening "Wherefore" in our text looks back to [Hebrews 10:35, 36](#), where the apostle had urged, "Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompense of reward. For ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise."

That exhortation had been followed by a lengthy proof of the efficacy of persevering faith to enable its possessors to do whatever God commands, however difficult; to endure whatever God appoints, however severe; to obtain what He promises, however seemingly unattainable.

All of this had been copiously illustrated in chapter 11, by a review of the history of God's people in the past, who had exemplified so strikingly and so blessedly the nature, the trials, and the triumphs of a spiritual faith. Having affirmed the *unity* of the family of God, the oneness of the O. T. and N. T. saints, assuring the latter that God has provided some better thing for us, the apostle now repeats the exhortation unto steadfast perseverance in the path of faith and obedience.

"Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us." Here the apostle applies the various illustrations given in the preceding chapter, making use of them as a grand motive to perseverance in the Christian faith and state.

"If all the saints of God lived, suffered, endured, and conquered by faith, shall not we also? If the saints who lived before the Incarnation, before the redemption was accomplished, before the High Priest entered the heavenly sanctuary, trusted in the midst of discouragements and trials, how much more ought we who know the name of Jesus, who have received the beginning, the installment of the great Messianic promise?" (Adolph Saphir). Herein we are shown that only

then do we read the O. T. narratives unto profit when we draw from them incentives to practical godliness.

*In [Hebrews 11](#) we have had described at length many aspects and characteristics of the life of faith. There we saw that a life of faith is an intensely practical thing, consisting of very much more than day-dreaming, or being regaled with joyous emotions, or even resting in orthodox views of the truth. By faith Noah built an ark, Abraham separated from his idolatrous neighbors and gained a rich inheritance, Moses forsook Egypt and became leader of Israel's hosts. By faith the Red Sea was crossed, Jericho captured, Goliath slain, the mouths of lions were closed, the violence of fire was quenched. A spiritual faith, then, is not a passive thing, but an active, energetic, vigorous, and fruitful one. The same line of thought is continued in the passage which is now *before us*, the same branch of truth is there in view again, only under a figure—a figure very emphatic and graphic.*

- An Exposition of Hebrews.

The one theme that runs through this chapter is endurance ([Heb. 12:1](#) ["patience"], 2-3, 7; also see [10:32](#), [36](#) ["patience"]).

The Jewish believers who received this letter were getting weary and wanted to give up; but the writer encouraged them to keep

moving forward in their Christian lives, like runners on a track (see [Phil. 3:12-14](#)).

He pointed out three divine resources that encourage a Christian to keep going when the situation is difficult.

The Example of the Son of God (Heb. 12:1-4)

When I was in junior high school, I had a coach who felt it his duty to make an athlete out of me. Everybody in my class could have told him he was wasting his time, because I was the worst athlete in the class—perhaps in the school! I entered a city-wide school competition, running the low hurdles. I knocked down six hurdles, fractured my left ankle, and immediately abandoned my sports career. (Shortly after, the coach enlisted in the army. I may have driven him to it.)

Coach Walker used several techniques to get me to do my best. "Other students have done it, and so can you!" was one of his encouragements. "Just think of what it will do for you physically!" was another. "Now, watch the other kids—see how they do it!" was a third. As I reflect on this experience, I am amazed to discover that these same three approaches are used in this paragraph, to encourage us in the Christian race.

Look around at the winners! (v. 1a) The "great... cloud [assembly, mass] of witnesses" was introduced to us in [Hebrews 11](#). They are the heroes of the faith. It is not suggested here that these men and women now in heaven are watching us as we run the race, like people seated in a stadium. **The word "witnesses" does not mean "spectators." Our English word "martyr" comes directly from the Greek word translated "witness." These people are not witnessing what we are doing; rather, they are bearing witness to us that God can see us through.**

God bore witness to them ([Heb. 11:2](#), [4-5](#), [39](#)) and they are bearing witness now to us.

"I rarely read the Old Testament, except for Psalms and Proverbs," a believer once told me.

"Then you are missing a great deal of spiritual help," I replied. I asked him to open to [Romans 15:4](#) and read the verse aloud.

"For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope."

I then explained that "patience" means "endurance," and that "comfort" means "encouragement." One of the best ways to develop endurance and encouragement is to get to know the godly men and women of the Old Testament who ran the race and won. If you are having problems with your family, read about Joseph. If you think your job is too big for you, study the life of Moses. If you are tempted to retaliate, see how David handled this problem.

- Bible Exposition Commentary – Be Confident (Hebrews).

Strong's Concordance

nep̄hos: a mass of clouds, a cloud

Original Word: νέφος, οὐς, τό

Part of Speech: Noun, Neuter

Transliteration: nephos

Phonetic Spelling: (nef'-os)

Definition: a mass of clouds, a cloud

Usage: a cloud; met: a dense crowd, a multitude, great company.

NAS Exhaustive Concordance

Word Origin

a prim. word

Definition

a mass of clouds, a cloud

NASB Translation

cloud (1).

Thayer's Greek Lexicon

STRONGS NT 3509: νέφος

νέφος, νέφους (allied with Latin nubes, nebula, etc.), τό, the Sept. for כֶּלֶם and כֶּלֶם, a cloud; in the N. T. once tropically, a large, dense multitude, a

throng: μαρτύρων, [Hebrews 12:1](#); often so in secular authors,

as νεφῶν Τροῶν, πεζῶν, ψαρων, κολοιων, Homer, Iliad 4, 274; 16, 66; 17, 755; 23, 133; ἀνθρώπων, Herodotus 8, 109; στρουθῶν, Aristophanes av.

578; ἀκρίδων, Diodorus 3, 29; peditum equitumque nubes, Livy 35,

49. [SYNONYMS: νέφος, νεφέλη: νέφος is general, νεφέλη specific; the former denotes the great, shapeless collection of vapor obscuring the heavens; the latter designates particular and definite masses of the same, suggesting form and limit. Cf. Schmidt vol. i., chapter 36.]

The Encouragement to Run

*Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us,
(12:1a)*

We are all creatures of motivation. We need a reason for doing things and we need encouragement while we are doing them. One of the greatest motivations and encouragements to the unbelieving Jews, as well as to Christians, would be all these great believers from the past, their heroes, who lived the life of faith. The **cloud of witnesses** are all those faithful saints just mentioned in chapter 11. We are to run the race of faith like they did, always trusting, never giving up, no matter what the obstacles or hardships or cost.

They knew how to run the race of faith. They opposed Pharaoh, they forsook the pleasures and prerogatives of his court, they passed through the Red Sea, shouted down the walls of Jericho, conquered kingdoms, shut the mouths of lions, quenched the power of fire, received back their dead by resurrection, were tortured, mocked, scourged, imprisoned, stoned, sawn in two, had to dress in animal skins, were made destitute—all for the sake of their faith.

Now the writer says, "You should run like they did. It can be done, if you run as they did—in faith. They ran and ran and ran, and they had less light to run by than you have. Yet they were all victorious, every one of them."

I do not believe that **the cloud of witnesses surrounding us** is standing in the galleries of heaven watching as we perform. The idea here is not that we should be faithful lest they be disappointed, or that we should try to impress them like a sports team trying to impress the fans in the bleachers. These are witnesses *to* God,

not *of us*. They are examples, not onlookers. They have proved by their testimony, their witness, that the life of faith is the only life to live.

To have a whole gallery of such great people looking down on us would not motivate us but paralyze us. We are not called to please them. They are not looking at us; we are to look at them.

Nothing is more encouraging than the successful example of someone who has "done it before." Seeing how God was with them encourages us to trust that He will also be with us. The same God who was their God is our God. The God of yesterday is the God of today and tomorrow. He has not weakened, or lost interest in His people, or lessened His love and care for them.

We can run as well as they did. It has nothing to do with how we compare with them, but in how our God compares with theirs.

Because we have the same God, He can do the same things through us if we trust Him.

- MacArthur New Testament Commentary – Hebrews.

We desperately need this victory in Jesus...
What's broken?

- Our world's cross-continental cultures
- Our countries, cities & communities
- Our citizens & even our children

- Our Christ-claiming churches
- Our “Christ-less Christianity”

*** Cloud of witnesses:

***Contrast the “even if” cloud/church
with the “ya but” cowards & crowds!***